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THE LADY OF LYNDON

BY

JAMES HENRY FOX

WITH A PRACTICAL HISTORY OF
THE LADY OF LYNDON

BY

JOHN HENRY FOX

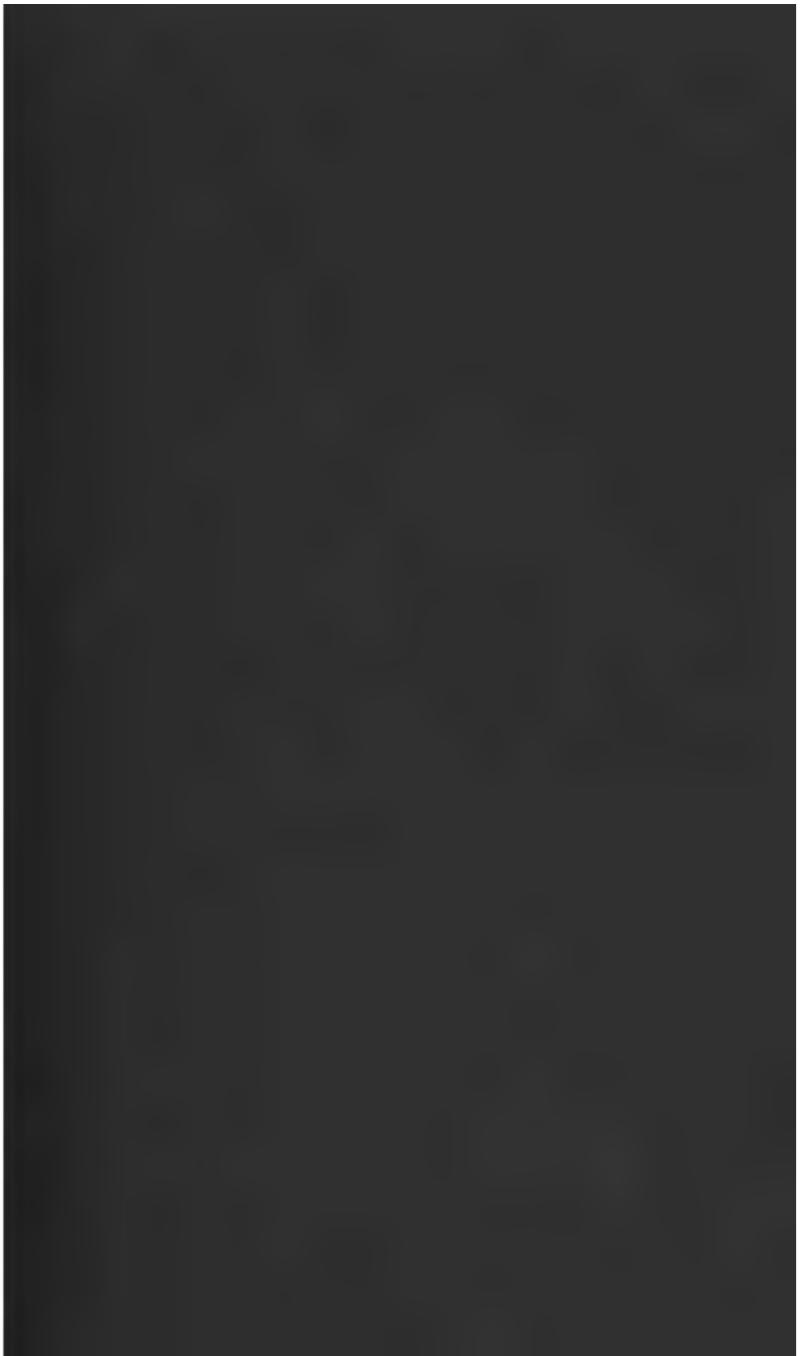
WITH A PRACTICAL HISTORY OF
THE LADY OF LYNDON

BY



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THE LADY OF LYNDON.

VOL. I.



THE LADY OF LYNDON.

BY

LADY BLAKE,

AUTHOR OF

“CLAUDE,” “HELEN’S FIRST LOVE,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE LADY OF LYNDON.

CHAPTER I.

FOR many years Mr. Welby had been accustomed to pause in his walk or his drive as he passed the old house known as Lyndon Court, and, looking up at the closed windows, would say to his wife, "Ah! I wish the old place would open its eyes again, and look upon us and brighten up all the country and people round, as it used to do in the good old times."

And then Mrs. Welby would observe for the hundredth time, "Yes, I wish the Court were inhabited—it would be very pleasant to have neighbours there; and such a good thing too for all the poor people in the parish."

Mr. Welby was the clergyman of Lyndon,

and it was but natural they should regret the dreary aspect of the fine old place, which owned all the land in the parish of Lyndon, and extended some miles beyond that. His regrets too were of an individual as well as general nature, for Mr. Welby had been tutor to Sir Montague Lyndon, and had known the house in its gayest and most cheerful days. The clergyman's wife, however, had no part in those recollections, for she had only come to Lyndon on her marriage, when Mr. Welby had been presented to the family living by his former pupil, and on the strength of that piece of good fortune had ventured at last to unite his fate to that of the woman to whom he had been engaged for many years past. It may therefore be inferred that neither the clergyman nor his wife were young people when, about ten years before the date of this story, they first took up their abode at the Lyndon parsonage.

At that time Sir Montague was living abroad —he had married there, and had never visited

Lyndon Court since. He wrote occasionally to his former tutor; and the poor people about were generally well cared for. It was not, however, like having the great house in the place occupied, and that was a circumstance often and feelingly deplored by Mrs. Welby. She was, too, of a sociable disposition, and would have been glad to have had the lady of Lyndon Court within such easy reach.

No one knew much about this said lady, it appeared. Sir Montague had announced his marriage with very few comments on the bare circumstance. The only person who was better informed on this important subject was a Mr. Denbigh, who lived in the neighbourhood, and had been an early friend and associate of his pupil. From Mr. Denbigh it was gathered that Sir Montague had married his wife when she was very young, and from a French school in Brussels. Lady Lyndon was English, and her name duly ascertained to be Miss Alice Smythe. Mr. Denbigh believed her to be an orphan—he was not acquainted with any of

her family or antecedents. She was extremely beautiful—at least, people in general considered her so. And then Mrs. Welby would ask, And was the lady as good as she was handsome? and with every appearance of sincerity, Mr. Denbigh would declare he had no reason to believe otherwise.

Time passed on, and still the absent master of the Court came not; but it seemed Sir Montague, when in England, passed much of his time at a pretty place he owned on the southern coast; whilst he also made frequent excursions to Scotland, and it was said spent some weeks there every year.

It was tantalizing to Mr. Welby and his wife to hear these flying rumours of his friend and patron, almost within reach it seemed, and often passing and repassing within some score of miles of his own old ancestral place, and yet never coming within sight or sound of it. At last there came a report from his steward that Sir Montague's health was failing—Lady Lyndon appeared to write all her husband's letters.

The old man expressed his fears to the clergyman that Sir Montague was destined, like the rest of his family, to an early grave.

Mrs. Welby heard the report from her husband with a kindly, sympathizing heart, for she had often heard him speak of the brother and the two sisters who had died early, but not before he had known the family.

“But Sir Montague has a family, I think?” asked the clergyman’s wife in her gentle tones.

“Yes, yes, to be sure—there were three of them, but only two now; and they must be growing up. Yes, it is a great blessing and comfort that there are children.”

“Yes, a child—that is, children—are great comforts and blessings,” replied the wife, in a choked voice. And then her thoughts reverted to a little grave in the churchyard close by, where the grass and the daisies had long been growing, as well as a few simple flowers, planted round and cherished by loving hands. It was the grave of the first and last blessing of that kind sent to the clergyman and his wife—

oh! how dearly prized!—sent at the end of the first year of their married happiness, to fill up, as it seemed, their cup of joy. And then, two or three short years after, as mysteriously it was taken away. It was a bitter and hard trial, and at first the sorrowing parents were tempted to ask—Why had the blessing been sent only, as it were, to break their hearts by its early removal? No doubt, to their patient, faithful hearts an answer was vouchsafed, which brought, in due time, that peaceful resignation which had upheld them throughout. At all events, there was one lesson learned during that brief season of happiness which survived the wreck of its extinction, and that was to inspire the clergyman and his wife with the tenderest interest in, and sympathy for, the youngest and weakest members of their flock, and also to teach in its fullest and deepest significance the obligations and requirements of all that the endearing term “paternity” embraces, either as regards its divine or human relation.

“Don’t grieve, wife, or murmur, by looking

back too longingly," said the clergyman tenderly, as he marked the course his wife's thoughts had taken, and pressed her arm more closely to his side, as if to shield and protect her from the incursion of too sorrowful recollections. He might well have added, as she looked up in his kind, thoughtful face with a smile full of hope and faith—"Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" and the answer would no doubt have been satisfactory. Well, they were a good and even enviable pair, this quiet, commonplace clergyman and his wife.

Soon after the last announcement concerning Sir Montague Lyndon came the news that he had died of rapid decline at his place in Devonshire, on the coast, leaving one son, the present baronet, and a daughter. This important piece of news of course gave rise to endless conjectures and speculations, concerning the family thus left, in a place where the Lyndons had reigned, as it were, for so many generations. By diligent reference to that convenient and indispensable Red Book chronicling the

dates of births, marriages, and deaths of the upper ten, it was duly ascertained that the present Sir Vere Lyndon was twenty, and Mr. Denbigh furnished the further information that his sister was two years younger. Then followed the question of breathless interest—Were these young people and their mother likely now to take up their abode at the long deserted family place? This was a query no one could satisfactorily answer, but it was one which was much debated at the time, not only throughout the parish of Lyndon itself, but quite as much in the adjacent populous little town of Hilborough and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Mr. Denbigh's place, Nether Hall, was close to this said town of Hilborough—indeed, the lodge gates on one side opened into the wide common that skirted the furthest end of the town from the Lyndon side. There was a fine avenue of sweet chestnut-trees which led from the gates directly to the house, dimly visible therefrom about half a mile distant, and this

avenue was one of the most remarkable features of the place. The house was a massive red brick pile of building, with turreted corners and stone casements, rather heavy, and somewhat ugly, but respectable in its antiquity and the air of opulent comfort which reigned within and without, and characterized everything belonging to Mr. Denbigh. He had inherited the property when quite a young man from a long line of ancestors, who had held their own in that neighbourhood without much change of circumstances, or seemingly any ambitious desire on their part either to enlarge their domain or to quit it for any other.

The present man was a widower with an only son. He had followed somewhat closely in the footsteps of his predecessors, maintaining the character of high-bred respectability and honour for which the Denbighs had been ever noted. They were essentially a county family of the highest class amongst its commoners, not on account of its wealth, though that was considerable. Still there were many men of larger

means and more extensive property in the county, that could never have commanded the same respect and consideration that the Denbighs of Nether Hall met with habitually.

A "Denbigh"—man or woman—never married out of his or her own class. There had not been such a thing on record as a *mésalliance* in the old family. Neither had there been any spendthrifts among the elder, or black sheep among the junior branches of the family. The family estate had hitherto provided handsomely for all its children, and the Army was generally the chosen profession of its younger sons.

This Nether Hall was the principal, indeed only large place in the immediate vicinity of Hilborough, but there was another house not far distant which had its distinctive claims to consideration. This place was called "The Grove," and also belonged to Mr. Denbigh. It had always been appropriated as the Dower-house to the use of the Denbigh ladies, when unfortunately called upon to leave Nether Hall. Owing to the early death of the present possess-

or's mother, there had been no use for the place in the family, and in consequence Mr. Denbigh had let it soon after he succeeded to the property, many years ago. It was the opinion of the town of Hilborough that Mr. Denbigh had done well in so doing, and was fortunate in the tenant thus secured, and that the town itself received an accession of dignity and importance when the Dowager Lady Fullerton, widow of the Earl of that name (and one of the county magnates), took up her abode at Hilborough Grove.

The town of Hilborough, and the inhabitants in general, were certainly disinterested in their rejoicings at the advent of Lady Fullerton. She was the second wife of the Earl, and was left with a somewhat slender provision for herself and only daughter. Her son had already been installed in a family living in the neighbourhood. Mr. Denbigh might have had an *arrière pensée* in his desire to secure Lady Fullerton as his tenant. She was not a pleasant person herself. She was both poor and proud. Her own family was as good as her husband's, but a very impoverished

one—so she had little or nothing to expect from them. Her stepson, the present Earl, would have done anything he could for his father's widow, but unhappily he had a wife who was adverse to his good intentions, and by her he was governed or guided in most things, especially when his own inclinations tallied with hers. It therefore came to pass that Lady Fullerton (Dowager) entered with great readiness into the proposition—how originated no one can tell—that she should hire Mr. Denbigh's vacant place, called the Grove, and about twenty miles from Hampden Castle.

Mr. Denbigh, during the time he was young and unmarried, was often at the Castle, and he had seen and admired Lady Jane Hampden, who was then hardly introduced. Lady Fullerton, on her part, had noted this circumstance, and she was glad to encourage it by becoming Mr. Denbigh's tenant; and thus it was they came to Hilborough Grove.

Lady Jane was at that time a fine-looking girl, with frank, pleasant manners, and some-

thing about her that passed for beauty—or made up for the want of it. Mr. Denbigh's love was not fated to meet with the return it deserved—for she unfortunately preferred his friend Mr. Lyndon. The three families were on intimate terms, and Lady Fullerton would have been perfectly satisfied with either of the young men as her son-in-law. There was a time when Mr. Lyndon seemed likely to gain the prize. Mr. Denbigh was given to understand, in the kindest way possible, by Lady Jane herself, that he had no chance; and he then withdrew, and left the field open to his friend.

For some time all went well. Mr. Lyndon was one of the handsomest, most fascinating men of his day, and Lady Jane Hampden loved him well—too well for her own peace of mind, for after a time his attentions began to slacken, and his ardour to cool. About that time his father (who had earnestly desired the match) died. Sir Montague, after pretending to be deeply engrossed with the many things devolving upon him in his new position, at last ceased

to visit at the Grove. Soon after he went abroad, remained there, and when there married, Lady Jane became an altered woman after that. She lost her bloom and good looks early, and her frank, open manner was succeeded by a certain brusqueness of bearing and of speech. The Dowager deplored the loss of both such eligible sons-in-law. For Mr. Denbigh she always retained her former partiality, but was in the habit of making bitter and sarcastic remarks touching Sir Montague's marriage, and his affairs in general. Lady Jane, when present, always cut these observations very short, but when she was absent her mother would indulge more at large with the favoured few who were admitted to her intimate acquaintance, and to the privilege of enlivening her unoccupied hours with the small gossip of the country town and neighbourhood around.

At the head of this chosen and favoured band stood two ladies of middle age—inveterate talkers and gossips, it must be allowed. Still they were good-hearted women and well-con-

nected—ladies both by birth and education—and best known throughout Hilborough as “the Admiral’s daughters.”

CHAPTER II.

THESE two ladies were, however, simply the daughters of a Captain Tempest, in the Royal Navy. He was a curious specimen of the genuine unalloyed “British Tar,” as he existed some half century ago. No doubt Captain Tempest ought long before his decease to have been an admiral; and it was owing to his vehemently-expressed opinion on that head, as well as his own appreciation of his merits as a naval commander, that he obtained the *sobriquet* of “the Admiral.” He belonged to a county family of some importance, but which, like the rest of the world, failed to recognise his peculiar claims to distinction; therefore Captain Tempest saw but little of his relations, and when he did so,

it was to be feared he did not make himself as agreeable as might have been desired.

There was happily one person in the world who accredited him according to his own valuation, and that happened to be the gentle woman he took to be his wife. Mrs. Tempest was a native of Littleborough, and inheriting a small property there, her husband honoured the place by fixing his residence there when not in active service, and at last leaving his family to inherit the house he had built.

It was a strange, uncomfortable sort of dwelling that Captain Temple caused to be erected in place of the comfortable farm-house he chose to pull down. As he elected, however, to live there himself, and farm his own land when not better engaged, no one could object to any sort of dwelling it might please the eccentric captain to build. This place he called "The Cabin," and whatever others might think of the building, it is certain the owner of it regarded it with feelings of unmitigated admiration. Nothing could be more queer and uncomfortable

when finished than this habitation, both inside and out. And so the Cabin remained till after the death of the “Admiral.” His wife had preceded him some few years, and people said he had never been the same since. He had shown but little affection for his gentle helpmate during her life, but he broke down perceptibly after he lost her. He bequeathed the Cabin, with all the curiosities contained in it, and a small income, to his two daughters. His only son had married to displease him, and to him he left nothing. Soon after both the son and his wife died, leaving as their sole inheritance two orphan children, recommending them to the tender mercies of their maiden aunts, Arethusa and Penelope Tempest. These ladies were by no means indisposed to undertake the charge thus entrusted to them, Arethusa thinking herself perfectly competent to direct a masculine education; whilst Penelope was equally ardent in her desire to bring up the little girl according to her own peculiar views and opinions.

Thus were the two orphan children speedily

committed to the care and guardianship of their maiden aunts. The boy, Fitzgerald—commonly called Fitz—being a handsome, quick lad of his age, soon managed to obtain a certain ascendancy over his eldest aunt, who had been too long accustomed to obey, to have acquired any very strong habits of command, and soon became a perfect slave to the bright, bold, big boy she had intended to bring up and educate according to her own plan. Happily for Fitz, before he was quite spoiled, an old friend of his father's came to the rescue, got the lad sent to the Naval Academy at Blackheath, and then took him out with him in his own ship, and out of harm's way at the Cabin.

This Cabin had somewhat improved in appearance since the two spinster sisters held undisputed sway there. Its outside unsightliness was in great measure veiled and softened by the ivy and various plants they now trained all over its walls. The ship-shape cut and order too of everything within the Cabin was much modified and improved. Both sisters, however, re-

tained an almost superstitious veneration for some of the monster marine curiosities collected there by their father ; and although they had rather looked upon them with horror during the Admiral's lifetime, they became after his death a sort of sacred bequest, which neither of the sisters cared to remove.

Little Winifred, who at first regarded the stuffed crocodile with the most lively dread, became so well accustomed to its mute presence, that her aunts were satisfied it was as good as a lesson in natural history to the child, and as useful as it was ornamental.

Penelope did not get on as well as she expected in her work of education. She had, like most spinsters, a very visionary idea of the pleasures of training the infant mind. Little Winnie was very idle, and she became peevish when urged to do anything she disliked. Then she was extremely pretty and very delicate—looking so, at all events—and Penelope did not like to make the child cry, and redden her pretty eyes. And soon the little girl began to

find out that, by kissing and coaxing, she could ward off the objectionable lessons, whilst music and drawing were sure to bring on a headache ; so Winnie stood as good a chance of being spoilt by Penelope as Fitz had narrowly escaped with his Aunt Arathusa. Winnie's education soon became a very hopeless affair, as she had a quiet way of putting aside all disagreeables in the way of instruction, and going her own way ; whilst Penelope fagged after her impracticable niece, and began to despair of the success of her best and most perfect scheme of education.

One day Lady Jane came to the rescue of the perplexed aunt, to the confusion of her contrary pupil.

“ What is the matter ? ” asked Lady Jane, as, after the usual greetings were over, she observed Penelope’s tired countenance, and the languid look and attitude of the young scholar.

“ I don’t know,” said the puzzled Penelope ; “ but it seems I cannot make this arithmetic in any way clear to Winnie’s comprehension. She

seems to understand it one minute and forget it the next."

"Let me look at your slate, Winnie," said the visitor.

Winnie's slate was given up with an air of careless indifference, and was found to be covered with strange animals and people—everything, in short, but the figures that ought to have been visible.

"But where is your sum, child?" asked Lady Jane sharply.

"Oh! that's it," replied Winnie.

"What do you mean? I see nothing but bad drawings of ugly people and things."

"Oh! they stand for the other figures. I can't carry them else in my head—I get so puzzled—and it aches already."

"Send her out for a walk, then," said Lady Jane, to the entire satisfaction of both teacher and pupil. And then, as soon as the child was gone, she turned to the aunt and said shortly, "Send her to school."

"Oh! but she is so delicate!" pleaded Penelope.

"Winnie will get strong enough there."

After a little more argument and persuasion, Lady Jane carried the day. Winnie Tempest went to a tolerably good school, and Aunt Penelope was delivered from the torments of teaching. It was very pleasant, after that, having the child at home for the holidays, when there was no necessity for application of any sort or kind; and Winnie had pretty loving ways that made her quite an idol to her aunts, especially Penelope, who considered Winnie her especial charge, whilst the boy belonged more exclusively to her elder sister. Fitz, too, came home in his turn, for he considered the Cabin as his real home; and when he first came back from sea everyone in it was so pleased to see, and proud of the handsome sailor boy.

Happily Fitz Tempest had not much idle time on his hands, in the early years of his profession, to bestow on any of his friends. He

had been quickly passed from one ship to another, at the instance of the friend who had first taken him up, and who wisely considered constant employment was the most essential service he could render the boy.

In due time Fitz stepped out of his midshipman's berth into the more important position of lieutenant, his first voyage being made in that capacity in his patron, Captain Dundas's, own ship. At the present time, Fitz was daily expected home, after an absence of three years; and Winnie, who had taken her final leave of school life about a year previous, was rapturously looking forward to such a delightful break in the somewhat monotonous existence she led with her two aunts at the Cabin. This life, however, composed as it was of small interests, was not wholly distasteful to Winnie. She rather enjoyed the petty details of village gossip, and entered warmly into all the concerns of her neighbours, either as they came under her own observation, or as retailed for her edification by her two aunts. She delighted

in wandering from house to house, and picking up all the crumbs of gossip that fell in her way. Poor Winnie! she had not much amusement at home, nor much talent for finding it for herself. Her aunt Arethusa, after attentively studying her young niece's inclinations and habits, with the view of providing something of a small library for her use and edification, came to the conclusion that books of any kind were not much in Winnie's way.

"In fact, I fear," said she to her sister one day, in strict confidence, "I fear that Winnie is a bit of a dunce."

Penelope heard the awful verdict with something of a smile, followed by a little sigh, as she observed in reply,

"All the consequence of sending the poor child to school—she got such a surfeit of books there; it would not have been so if I could have followed out my plan and brought her up my own way."

"But you know you could not do it, Pen, so where is the good of talking about it now?"

And after that weighty argument, poor Penelope held her tongue, and gave in to her elder sister, as she was wont at most times to do.

There was undoubtedly a spice of the old sea captain in his eldest daughter's composition, but it had, happily for herself and others, been so kept under in her more youthful days that it seldom made itself unpleasantly apparent.

It happened one bright summer day, somewhere about this time, when the sisters had been discussing their pretty little niece's propensities and prospects in various ways, that the said young person made her sudden and rather unexpected appearance. Winnie had gone off early in the morning to spend a long day at Lyndon Parsonage with Mrs. Welby, and when that was the case she seldom returned till late in the evening. It was barely four o'clock when Winnie walked in through the open window, or rather door, in the Cabin drawing-room, which always stood open, the room looking out into the little lawn garden.

"Why, child, how early you are come back! Are the Welbys going out to dinner?" asked Aunt Penelope, at the first glance.

Whilst her sister, having scanned the young lady's appearance more narrowly, exclaimed,

"What an object you look, Winnie!—for all the world as if you had been tearing through all the gooseberry bushes in the country!—your nice new muslin is all torn; and I see your gloves and hands stained as well."

"So they are, auntie; and I have been amongst the bushes in the Rectory garden all the morning, helping old Sally to gather the currants, and pick them for preserving."

"Dear me, what a child you are still, Winnie!" sighed Penelope.

Her sister asked, "And where was Mrs. Welby all the time that you were improving your mind and your muslin in that way?"

"Oh! not far off—she was in and out all the time, and we had a great deal of nice improving chat—quite enough to satisfy you, Auntie Thusy."

"And Mr. Welby—wasn't he at home too?" asked Penelope.

"No—he was out all the morning: and then, when he came back, he brought such a delightful little, or rather great piece of news, that I came straight home to tell you both. And now," continued the girl, with a mischievous pout, "you both seem so little pleased with me and my appearance in any way, that—that really I think I had better keep my news to myself."

"Oh! Winnie," pleaded Aunt Pen, quite pathetically, "how can you say *both*. I am sure I only wanted to know the reason you came back sooner than you intended, and have never made a remark of any kind as to your looks or anything."

"Well, then, it was Aunt Arethusa, who was so unkind."

"Come, come," said the accused lady, briskly, "tell us all you have got to tell, child. I am sure you are quite as ready and anxious to tell as we are to hear."

"Oh! you *are* ready and anxious! Well, that confession mends the matter a little. So now, listen, Aunt Pen, and Aunt Thusie. Mr. Welby heard to-day that—that—that the family at Lyndon Court are coming home directly. There, what do you think of my news?"

"Goodness!" said Penelope, "what a thing it will be for all the neighbourhood, won't it, Arethusa?"

"I wonder whether it is true? It is not the first time there has been such a report," observed Miss Tempest, cautiously.

"True!" exclaimed Winnie, impetuously. "It is as true as black and white can make it. Why, it came in a letter from Lady Lyndon herself to the steward who lives up at the Court—or rather close by, in that pretty little house near the gardens, Mr. Pitman. You know whom I mean?"

"I should think so, child. Well, if he said it, and Lady Lyndon really wrote to say it, I suppose there *is* something in it," replied Aunt Arethusa.

"I should think there must be, indeed! I wonder if anyone else in the place has heard it?" said Penelope.

"I can tell you no one has yet, and that was why I ran home so fast to let you know. And a pretty reception I got. I tore my dress getting over the gate—the near way across the meadow," said Winnie, laughing as she displayed the rent.

The young girl looked very pretty as she stood there, even in her somewhat dishevelled state. Her straw hat was thrown on the floor. It was not a high hat, nor a fashionable hat of the present day, but a shady straw hat, that seemed to keep Winnie's delicate complexion from tanning, and under which the coils of dark hair were seen arranged in very becoming order—or sometimes disorder; and her large dark grey eyes glanced up very prettily under the wide, flapping brim. It was a sweet little kittenish face, too short for perfect symmetry, but it suited the slender figure, which was rather

under the average height. But, whilst Winnie stood and laughed, a shadow fell across her path.

CHAPTER III.

WINNIE was standing much where she had entered, close by the window, for she had not made many steps into the room, when this shadow caught her eye, and ere she could turn to inquire whence it came, the shadow was closely followed by a substance, and Winnie felt herself in the grasp of two powerful arms belonging to a tall though slight figure, surmounted by a head of which the distinguishing characteristic was an ample dark beard, which seemed to obscure every feature of the face; and, to Winnie's horror, this dark-bearded face was in a moment closely pressed to hers, and bestowing a shower of kisses, against which she was struggling in vain.

In a moment or two she was set at liberty, whilst her stifled cry of “How dare you? Go away! I don’t know you!” was met with a burst of laughter, as the young man took up his position at a little distance from the panting, ruffled little beauty, who, her indignation choked with tears, appealed to her aunts to turn out the intruder. To her surprise, however, they both laughed also, and held out hands and faces to be shaken and kissed at the pleasure of the bearded youth. Then in a moment came a flash of recollection, and dimples and smiles chased the passion and tears, as Winnie in her turn came forward with, “Oh! Fitz, how could you serve me so? How could I guess it was you, so altered with that dreadful beard?”

“I am sorry, my darling little sister, you think it so dreadful, for I have been pleasing myself with the idea that it is a very handsome beard.”

“Oh, Fitz, dear, I don’t know—it may be—but it alters you so; but now you speak, I

begin to see and feel it *is* you. Oh ! Fitz, darling, it *is* your own dear self at last!"

"Indeed it *is* myself, and no other; so now will you venture to give me a kiss of your own accord, Winnie ?"

"Yes, I think I *may* venture," replied Winnie, throwing both arms round her brother's neck, and hanging there very happily for a minute or two, as she had done when he left her full three long years ago.

It was a long time in the girl's life, for she was but fourteen when he went away; and he, four years older, was altered in those three years almost beyond the power of recognition on her part, though neither of the aunts had for a moment suspected the intruder to be any other than their long-expected and most welcome nephew. Possibly, if Winnie had not been taken at such a disadvantage, she might also have recognised Fitz, strangely altered as he was in many ways from the slight beardless boy of eighteen who had quitted home three years before. However, it was not long before

she became accustomed to his changed appearance, and discovered the well-remembered traits of the dearly loved brother beneath the beard and moustache which had at first so effectually disguised them. In fact, as Winnie gazed wonderingly at her newly-arrived brother, she began to admire him exceedingly, and to feel, moreover, how great must be his claim on the admiration of all beholders. She longed to show this recent addition to their small female family party, and began to speculate in her busy little brain on the various advantages that would accrue to their social position from such a charming acquisition.

It appeared that the two maiden aunts were also, though more openly, of Winnie's way of thinking, for the early five o'clock dinner which followed close on Fitz's appearance had hardly been concluded before Penelope observed,

“Really, Arethusa, we must not keep all this good news to ourselves—all our neighbours will be so delighted to hear of dear Fitz's return home; and how charmed they will be when

they see him so altered and improved, grown so manly, and everything that we can desire!"

"Yes," returned Arethusa, meditatively considering her nephew from her seat at the head of the table to the opposite place—"it is very satisfactory to see him growing up so like our dear father."

Fitz made something of a wry face as he recalled the appearance of his respected grandfather, as he remembered him when quite a boy; but knowing it was the highest compliment his eldest aunt could devise, he swallowed the unpalatable morsel of flattery with the best grace he could, and only replied,

"Three years is a long time in a man's life at my age, though it is quickly passed away, and you three all look much the same. I do not think Winnie even is much grown or altered. I should have known her little kitten face anywhere."

"That is lucky," said Winnie, laughing, "seeing how you presumed on your recollection. You would have looked rather foolish if

you had made a mistake on your first arrival."

"Now, then," said Penelope, who had been fidgeting with her cherry-stalks for some time past, and was longing to exhibit her prize—"I really think we ought to go out, this evening. Suppose we walk up to the Grove? Dear Lady Fullerton and Lady Jane will be so pleased to see we have got Fitz safe home again."

"Yes," said her sister; "we will walk there first, and tell them the news of the Lyndon people coming home. I think Fitz ought to call there first."

"Won't it keep till to-morrow, my dear aunt?" pleaded Fitz. "Do give me a half holiday on my return home."

"Oh! yes," said Winnie, coming to her brother's rescue, "it will be best for you and Aunt Thusie to go and tell them all about everything, and then Fitz and I can go up to-morrow and show ourselves, or rather *him*, for there is not much novelty in seeing me at any time."

“Very well,” said Penelope, who was easy to be entreated at all times; “then you promise to go to-morrow, so we will leave you and Winnie this evening.”

“That will be jolly,” said the young sailor. “And we will go and sit in the old boat-house, and spin no end of yarns. Winnie shall tell me all she has been doing the last three years, and I will get my pipe out and listen at mine ease.”

“Very good,” said Winnie. “I don’t mind the pipe at all—I think it is rather nice in the open air.”

“Ah! that was where my poor father used to sit and smoke these long summer evenings after dinner,” observed Miss Tempest, with a sigh of dutiful recollection, and looking out of the window at the said summer-house, which was rather an unsightly edifice, composed of an old boat stuck on end, and furnished with uncomfortable seats and a small rickety table within.

The brother and sister were therefore happily left to follow their own devices, and enjoy

themselves after their own fashion, whilst the two elder ladies soon departed on their mission to the Grove. They found Lady Fullerton and her daughter, as they expected, in their usual after-dinner places and positions. Lady Fullerton, according to custom, was reclining, with her feet drawn up, on a small sofa, which in summer was wheeled close to the window looking out on the lawn, then bright with the many-coloured flower-beds dotted about its surface ; whilst Lady Jane sat just without the window on a garden-chair, in the shade of the verandah, and near enough to hear and reply to any observations emanating from the occupant of the sofa.

On this particular evening the mother and daughter were not alone. A tall, middle-aged gentleman, of clerical appearance, was slowly pacing up and down the room, stopping now and then to speak to or answer any remark made by Lady Fullerton. As the Miss Tempests were announced, a slightly peevish ejaculation, quickly suppressed, rose to his lips as

he turned to meet them, whilst they advanced with eager greetings, as they recognised in the owner of the tall drooping figure the good-looking but somewhat discontented countenance of the Honourable and Reverend Augustus Hampden, Lady Fullerton's only son, and the rector of Stoney Marsh, a good Government living, some four or five miles distant from Hilborough.

“Quite an unexpected pleasure,” said both the sisters, in a breath; adding, as they shook the limp hand tended to each of them by the grave-looking clergyman, “And how is dear Mrs. Hampden? I hope she is come with you.”

“Oh! no, indeed—this hot weather is quite too much for her, without exposing herself to further fatigue in taking such a long drive here and back,” said Mr. Hampden, with a very aggrieved expression, both as regarded his wife’s delicacy of constitution, and the heat of that beautiful summer weather, which he apparently resented on her account.

“Dear me!” said Miss Tempest, “I fancied I

saw Mrs. Hampden sitting out there in the verandah with Lady Jane."

"Why," returned Mr. Hampden, with another reproachful glance at Miss Tempest—"surely you cannot mistake Edith for her mother! She is twice as tall, and not in the least like her."

"Ah! I see, it is my stupid mistake. But how Edith is grown this last year. I have not seen her for so long—not since you spent last winter abroad; and then she was away after that."

"Yes, Edith has been staying at her uncle's. We could hardly get her away—they would not let her come back for ever so long—it was very hard on her mother and me, and all of us."

"I daresay she enjoyed herself—it is generally very gay at the Castle."

"It was very dull then," was the plaintive reply, "for all the children were ill with whooping-cough, or something infectious, so no one would go near them; and my sister-in-law pro-

tested they were all so fond of Edith they could not let her come home."

"That is just like Isabella," said Lady Fullerton, from her sofa; "making every one useful to her, and caring little enough about them at other times."

"Yes, indeed," replied her son plaintively; "and knowing how delicate Georgie is, and wanting Edith at home, made it doubly selfish and inconsiderate."

"Well," replied Lady Fullerton, "if Georgina would try and exert herself a little more to look after the family and parish, and not leave it all to that child, it would do her no harm, and much good to everybody."

"But it is quite impossible that Georgie should exert herself; and, indeed, I should not allow her to try," said her husband, still more aggrieved.

"Well, it is your affair, not mine," returned his mother, indifferently, adding, "Perhaps, as you are near the bell, you will ring it, Augustus, and order some coffee for Miss Tempest?"

The two sisters had retreated during the few last words between mother and son, who, though supposed to be much attached to each other, never met without a little domestic sparring relative to family affairs, and things in general. It was hardly to be wondered at, as both Lady Fullerton and her son were each in their way disappointed people, and suffering more or less from the perverse nature of circumstances and events. It is needless to enter into the precise nature of their respective grievances, though it may be said Mr. Hampden thought himself an ill-used person in being still only a rector, when, considering his family connections and influence, he ought to have been a bishop, or at least a dean.

For this he owed the world in general a grudge, and especially those in it to whose favour and interest he might have looked for forwarding his claims on clerical consideration. The last thing he thought of looking at was at home, where the fault might perhaps have been more fairly laid, and been charged with more

impartiality. Mr. Hampden was also unfortunate in having chosen for his wife a useless fine lady, who, being transplanted from the gay routine of life in which she moved before her marriage into a quiet country parsonage, found and professed herself all unequal to the exigencies of her condition. She was extremely pretty, and her husband loved her with a sort of blind worship that excused all her defects, or rather admired her the more for them.

Mrs. Hampden was indolently good-natured. Indeed she had hardly strength of mind or body enough to differ with anyone, and provided she could live in an atmosphere of self-indulgent luxury, cared little for what the rest of the world did or thought. It might have been supposed that a family of eight children, born in rapid succession, might have suggested some motives for exertion in the mother. It was by no means the case with Mrs. Hampden. She was as obtusely indifferent to the requirements of her family as to those of her husband's parish, and from a very early age had been used to de-

volve many of her cares on her eldest girl, the Edith who had now accompanied her father in a visit to Hilborough Grove.

The Miss Tempests found the young girl talking eagerly and earnestly to her aunt, as they retreated into the verandah from the drawing-room window. A far more genial welcome, however, was accorded them by the daughter than by her frigid papa. She seemed really glad to see the old friends she remembered all her life, whilst Arethusa and Penelope appeared lost in wonder and admiration at the change time had wrought in their young favourite. Not that Edith Hampden was a beauty by any means. She had a bright, earnest face, with a frank, kindly expression, no great regularity of feature, but a fresh, fair complexion, with abundance of bright brown hair, matching the colour of her truthful-looking eyes, and a tall, slight, rather unformed figure, the chief attraction of which was the perfectly unstudied ease of all its movements.

Few people would have stopped to ask them-

selves whether Edith Hampden was pretty or not. There was something about her more taking than beauty. It was different with her next sister Florence, who was, to her mamma's great satisfaction, growing up into a beautiful girl, and as such became an object of almost lively interest to the indolent mother, whose favourite anticipations were all of the sensation she would produce when she appeared in the great world, and how she should manage to get her a suitable introduction thereinto, and how great a match she would eventually make.

Meanwhile Mrs. Hampden made much of her beautiful child, and dressed her up and petted her to her foolish heart's content; but Edith was decidedly her father's favourite. He, in his weakness of character and purpose clung to the unpretending sense and strength of his young daughter, so little conscious herself of her own mental superiority to her family surroundings. It was Edith who had to fill her mother's place in the household, control the domestic expenditure, assist her father in his parish affairs, teach

her two younger sisters, write to the boys at school, and lighten the toils of the nursery cares and occupations. It was no wonder Edith Hampden could be ill-spared from the Rectory-house at Stoney Marsh.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was very evident that in her quiet, undemonstrative way, Lady Jane Hampden loved her niece Edith dearly. She seldom talked about her, or expatiated on her affections—indeed, she said less about Edith in a year than the Miss Tempests did about Winnie in a month; but still her brother's eldest child had a large share of her thoughts; and if ever quiet, prosaic Lady Jane indulged in the perilous pleasure of castle-building, it was for Edith Hampden's whole and sole benefit.

On the evening in question, as soon as the Miss Tempests had been duly welcomed, Lady Jane rose from her seat, to accompany them back into the drawing-room, where she knew

her mother would expect all conversation should be carried on. They found Lady Fullerton and her son still engaged in a sort of testy combat of words, in which, by the way, it may be observed the lady never failed to have greatly the advantage. Mr. Hampden, though well-meaning, was by no means quick. His ideas moved in a certain groove, and even then were much obstructed by a natural querulousness of temper that was ever wont to see things in a gloomy point of view as regarded himself and his own affairs.

The Dowager Lady Fullerton, on the contrary, was sharp and quick-sighted enough as regarded men and motives too, and unsparing even towards the few she loved or liked. Her son certainly stood at the head of those she loved best in the world. She was not, however, blind to his defects, and still less so to those of his wife, whom she had never either loved or liked.

Mr. Hampden drew a breath of relief as he saw the four ladies emerge from the verandah,

and approach his mother's sofa, from whence she was haranguing him, apparently not much to his satisfaction. He turned quickly to his daughter—

"Come, Edith, it is time we order the ponies, and drive home again. Mamma will be expecting us."

"Hardly yet," said the Dowager, with a slightly ironical smile; "even Georgina must allow you a certain time to drive here and back, and take it into consideration that you may possibly spend an hour, or at least a half hour, with us now you are here."

Then to stop the retort she perceived ready to issue from her brother's lips, Lady Jane spoke quickly, abruptly,

"Augustus, I want you to do me a favour—leave Edith here for a week, it is so long since we have seen her—please do. You can send her things over by one of your people after you get back. Edith says she should like it."

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Hampden, looking extremely ill-used. "I wonder at that, for Edith

must know she cannot be spared from home just now without great inconvenience."

"I am sorry to hear that," returned his sister, regretfully; "but I thought now Florence is old enough, she might take her share a little in household matters, and relieve her mother."

"Oh! dear no—that would be quite a different thing indeed, Jane. Florence is too careless to be trusted for anything. She undertook to carry some wine in one bottle, and some embrocation in another for rheumatism, to two different cottages, and I do assure you she left the bottles at the wrong places, and the directions too. I assure you she did," repeated Mr. Hampden, with a plaintive smile, to the Miss Tempests.

"Then I hope you scolded her well," said Lady Fullerton, raising herself on her sofa with an angry gesture, and continuing, "Careless indeed!—a nice sort of carelessness to murder your parishioners!"

"Oh! no, no harm came of it happily, only

the wine was drunk by the wrong person, and the embrocation was wasted—thrown away untouched; but it was so like Flory, as her mother said."

"Like a stupid girl, who ought to know better," said the girl's grandmother, indignantly.

Mr. Hampden merely shrugged his shoulders helplessly in reply, and then turned to his daughter.

"Now, Miss Hampden, if you are ready to go home—I am."

"Oh! yes, papa." Then turning to the re-cumbent lady, Edith said, "It is very kind of Aunt Jane asking me to stay now, but I fear I can't, grandmamma; though perhaps you will have me a few weeks later. Florence is going to the Castle soon, so of course mamma will want me at home; but when she comes back——"

"Oh! you never told me Florence was going there, Augustus?"

"No—you gave me no time, mother; but you

know Edith is just come back from the Castle, so it is Flory's turn now."

"Yes, because it is going to be very gay there for the Deepdown Races, and poor Edith has had all the nursing and shutting up there, and now Miss Florence is going to amuse herself there."

"Well, that will not hurt Edith, I suppose, mother."

"Oh! grandmamma," said Edith, laughing merrily, "I assure you I had a very nice time there. Aunt Isabella was very kind, and so was my uncle, and the little ones are great pets. But now they are going to have a houseful of gay people, and are going to act charades and all sorts of things. I really think it will be more in Flory's way than mine; besides, she is so pretty, it is no wonder they all want to have her."

"But your cousins, Lady Constance and Lady Audrey, are both out now, are they not?" asked Miss Tempest at last, edging in a word with difficulty.

"Oh! yes, Constance and Audrey are both out, and Mildred is to be presented next season. She and Florence are exactly the same age."

"Pray, have you persuaded Isabella to take Florence with them next year, and give her the benefit of her introduction?" asked the Dowager Lady Fullerton of her son. "I know it is what Georgina has been scheming for this year or two past."

It may be observed, *en passant*, that, as the Isabella spoken of was the wife of her step-son, the reigning Lady Fullerton, and one of the most selfish fashionable fine ladies of her day, there was but little chance of her being so accommodating in respect to her beautiful niece, whilst her two far less handsome daughters remained to be disposed of. Mr. Hampden's reply was vague, and not very sanguine. He only said, "It is a long time to next season—many things may happen between this and then." He gave no time for further remarks on his mother's part, for he hastened to say good-bye

to her and the rest of the party, and then he and his daughter took their departure.

Lady Jane accompanied them to the hall door, and then the Miss Tempests were, for the first time, able to gain Lady Fullerton's ear, and impart all the tidings they came to announce. The fact of Fitz Tempest having come home did not seem to interest the Dowager particularly, but the news relating to Lyndon Court was evidently news of the first moment, and the two sisters found that it was news in all its freshness and novelty—not a word had been heard before of the expected return of the Lyndons. It could hardly, however, be called the *return* of the family, as none of those who now represented the ancient name had ever set foot within the old place before. The father was gone, and the young man, the present baronet, and supposed proprietor of the estate, was entirely unknown to everyone in the neighbourhood.

“I am glad you came and told me at once,” said the old lady. “It is so stupid to know

nothing of what is going on close to one. I think Mrs. Welby might have come up and let me know, seeing I was so well acquainted with the poor man that is gone ; and so was Jane, for the matter of that. Well, I wonder what the new master of Lyndon Court is like ? Have you heard anything about him ? Of course he is not married—he is too young.”

“ He is just two and twenty,” exclaimed both the sisters together.

“ Yes, I heard he was twenty when his father died, and that is just two years ago. I wonder what the widow is like, and whether she will come and live with her son ! I think there is a daughter, too. Well, she will have a good fortune, no doubt ; and as for the son, of course he comes into everything, and a fine property it is.”

To that very natural supposition the Miss Tempests could only assert their entire belief ; but as the extent of their knowledge of any particulars regarding the Lyndon Court family was confined to the Red Book, they could

afford no information which was not already possessed by Lady Fullerton; so they could only offer little suggestions, interspersed with small wonderments of their own on the subject. But these proved so interesting, even after the return of Lady Jane to the room, that it was almost dark before the two sisters took their leave, and retraced their steps to the Cabin.

Happily Lady Fullerton's newly-aroused interest in the Lyndons was not destined to expire for lack of fuel to keep the flame of her curiosity alive; for, in the course of the next morning, a visitor came who happened to be better informed than most people as to the family in question. It was Mr. Denbigh, who made his appearance not long after the two ladies were settled to their usual morning occupation. He was accustomed to drop in at the Grove at all times and seasons, and was always welcome, both to the Dowager and her daughter.

For many years after the death of his wife, the good people in and about Hilborough had

never ceased to wonder why Mr. Denbigh and Lady Jane Hampden did not marry. They were on very intimate terms, and made no secret of their mutual regard. It was very strange that nothing more should have come of it. It could not be on his son's account, for it was patent to the whole neighbourhood that there were none of his lady friends whom the boy liked so well as Lady Jane Hampden.

Bertram, or, as he was generally called, Barry Denbigh, was almost as much at home at the Grove as he was at Nether Hall; and it was with his friends there that Mr. Denbigh always left his boy when called away himself from home. It was the more strange that the two friends never seemed to advance a step nearer the conclusion so anxiously looked for by all their friends and neighbours.

The announcement of Mr. Denbigh on the morning in question appeared to cause something of a pleasant surprise to the two ladies sitting in that quiet, cool, pretty drawing-room, filled almost to overflowing with rare and pre-

cious china and other ornamental trifles of value, brought by the Dowager from the vast collection of the same sort from her former home.

“I had no idea you were come home,” said Lady Jane with a pleasant smile, as she shook hands with her old friend.

“I wonder the Miss Tempests did not mention it last night,” observed the Dowager, who seemed to place the most implicit faith in the faculty “the Admiral’s daughters” were well known to possess for acquainting themselves with the movements of all their neighbours, and depending upon their sagacity for bringing such information without delay to her ears.

“They are guiltless in this case,” returned Mr. Denbigh, “as they must, or ought to have been in bed and asleep when I reached my home. I came by the late train.”

“And where is Barry?” asked Lady Jane.

“That I can hardly tell you; all I know for certain is, not with me. We parted in London a fortnight ago, and I have only heard from him once since. He wants me to meet him in Scot-

land next month, and meanwhile he is on the move. I do not expect him home till September."

"And are you come home to stay?" asked Lady Fullerton.

"Not very long. I have been unexpectedly called home on business. You have heard, I daresay, that poor Montague Lyndon's family are coming to reside at the Court?"

"Yes, we heard of it yesterday evening," said Lady Jane, in a quiet subdued tone, with a dreamy look in her eyes that contrasted strangely with her usual quick, almost brusque style of speech and look, adding--"The Miss Tempests came up on purpose to tell us."

"Ah! the Admiral's daughters, purveyors of the latest news, and gossips in ordinary to the Dowager Lady Fullerton," remarked Mr. Denbigh with a laugh.

"Indeed, Mr. Denbigh, I am no gossip; but, living as quietly as I do here, often seeing no one for a month together when you are away, it is natural I should like to hear what is going

on just round about me ; and I am glad to hear these people are coming. It will make a little stir in the neighbourhood, and give people something to talk about, at least for a time. Now please tell us all you know about them."

" Well, to begin with the head of the house,—there is poor Montague's widow, in the first place," answered Mr. Denbigh, with a slight glance towards Lady Jane.

" In the *first place*, indeed!" repeated the Dowager peevishly. " I don't find myself in the first place now, nor, I daresay, does that Lady Lyndon. But please tell us what she is like, for no one seems to have known much about Sir Montague's marriage."

" It *was* a sudden fancy indeed," replied Mr. Denbigh slowly, as if he, like Lady Jane, was recalling a time and conjuring up scenes long past.

" Well, I hope there is nothing against her?" asked Lady Fullerton, with something of a suspicious look.

" Nothing in the world, I am happy to say.

She was, and is, very handsome. It was one of those uncontrollable fancies that sometimes act like a possession upon their victims, so it is fortunate that in this case the event seems to have been fully justified by time. The present Lady Lyndon's husband has shown the most extraordinary trust and confidence in her, for I can tell you, as one of his trustees—she is sole executor—that Sir Montague has left everything for her life to his wife, and in her power hereafter."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Dowager. "Well, I never thought him very wise, and now he seems to have acted like an idiot!"

"Wait, my dear lady, till you know something more about the persons concerned, and all the circumstances of the case, before you condemn our old friend so strongly."

"Sir Montague was no friend of mine," replied her ladyship, somewhat bitterly, looking at her daughter, who had by that time fully regained her accustomed look of quiet imperturbability; adding, "And it seems no friend to his

own family, from such an unjust proceeding."

"Is there any reason for treating his only son so unfairly?" asked Lady Jane, in her turn.

"None that I know of—except—he was not always his only, nor his elder son. There was another boy about a year older, and, I imagine, his father's favourite. Poor Sidney was drowned in a pleasure-boat at sea, and his brother narrowly escaped the same fate. I think I have heard the boys were wrestling together, and both fell overboard. Perhaps the father visited the misfortune of the loss of his elder and best-loved son upon the younger and surviving one. Let us hope his mother is a person who is likely to repair any injustice there may have been in the proceeding. It all rests with her who is now the Lady of Lyndon."

CHAPTER V.

IT was September, and rather late in the month, before the anxiously-expected family were duly reported as having positively arrived at Lyndon Court. There had been several false alarms in the earlier part of it, caused by the coming at intervals of the different members of the large establishment. It was evident the principal portion of it did not intend taking up their abode at the long disused residence till all within and without was in a fitting state of preparation to receive them suitably and comfortably.

It happened one day that Winnie Tempest had established herself, as was often her custom, at the Rectory for the day. Winnie had a good

deal of superfluous time at her command, especially since the month of September had set in, and Fitz had pastime provided for him which suited his taste better than sitting with his little sister in the boat-house, either smoking or spinning yarns. On the morning in question he had gone out at an early hour to accompany Barry Denbigh on a distant shooting expedition; and as he was to dine at Nether Hall, there was no chance of seeing him again for that day. Winnie therefore betook herself to her old friend, not without some hope of catching a distant glimpse of some of the Court retinue, seeing the Rectory lay under the very shadow of the trees of Lyndon Park, from which it was only separated by the clergyman's narrow strip of pasture behind the house. Into this little field (or "pightel," as it was the fashion to call the strip of ground Winnie strayed in the course of the morning. She took some early apples to feed the old pony, a particular pet of hers as long as she could remember; and once there, she and the pony found themselves such

good company that she quite forgot she had promised to help Mrs. Welby in the work on which she had left her engaged.

Whilst there Winnie had the satisfaction of seeing several well-known characters from the town of Hilborough pass close under the low hedge that separated the path through the park from the parsonage field. It was cheerful and pleasant, Winnie thought, to see the head man from Mr. Mason's, the grocer, go up, no doubt for orders, and soon after the butcher's boy walked by with an empty tray from the house—unmistakable tokens of the house so long silent and uninhabited being now restored to the usual routine of every-day life.

Whilst Winnie thus mused, and divided her attention between the old pony and the comers and goers from the Court, she was at length gratified by the sudden apparition, as from another path, of a lady who was evidently approaching the parsonage gate. This entrance to the front of the house could only be approached by a little side gate in the park paling,

and then walking a few yards on the high road upon which the Rectory gate opened. It was therefore evident that this lady, whoever she might be, was coming from the Court to call upon Mrs. Welby. Under this conviction, Winnie thrust the remaining piece of apple into the pony's mouth with such celerity as greatly to astonish, and slightly embarrass, that deliberate animal. Then, with much speed, she crossed the little field, and gained the back door of the premises, passing hastily through the kitchen and other offices, and presenting herself in the drawing-room, just as the bell at the front door made a faint tingle.

"You have got a visitor coming, Mrs. Welby!" exclaimed Winnie, in breathless haste.

"Yes, I hear the bell. I thought you had run away home, Winnie," said Mrs. Welby, looking up with a quiet smile, unruffled by her young friend's announcement.

"Oh, no! I was in the field feeding old Prince, and I saw a lady coming from the park

gate to your house, so I ran in to tell you. Who can she be?"

"Possibly the housekeeper at Lyndon Court, come to make some inquiries about the poor people here," replied the Rector's wife.

Just then Phyllis, the neat parlour-maid, made her appearance, bearing a card in her hand, which she laid before her mistress, saying, "The lady sent that, and says are you at home, please, ma'am?"

"Of course I am," returned Mrs. Welby, looking up slightly surprised, as she was not in the habit of denying herself to callers at any time, and then looking at the name on the card. But Winnie's impatience and curiosity had overcome her good-breeding, and she, looking over Mrs. Welby's shoulder, read the name aloud before the Rector's wife had time to decipher it.

"Lady Lyndon!" And then Winnie paused for a moment before she added—"How strange! —and no one to know she was come!"

"Not at all, dear; the family have been daily expected." Then, to the maid, "Pray tell

Lady Lyndon I shall be glad to see her. Ask her to come in."

Winnie seated herself in breathless expectation, whilst Mrs. Welby advanced a few steps nearer to the door to meet her coming guest.

"Lady Lyndon!" said Phyllis, with sonorous emphasis, and the lady so announced entered.

Winnie Tempest's first feeling was one of disappointment to see her so quietly and plainly dressed in black silk, with a shawl, bonnet, and veil of the same sombre hue, and which she had hardly had time to remark as she saw the stranger advance towards the Rectory gate. But Winnie was yet more struck with the extreme quietness—it might have been called coldness—of Lady Lyndon's manner. She said, in measured sentences,

"I have taken the liberty of calling first upon you, Mrs. Welby, because to-day is Saturday, and as I wish to go to your church to-morrow, I fancied Mr. Welby might like to know that some of us are arrived before we make our appearance in his church."

“It was a very kind thought on your part, Lady Lyndon, and both my husband and I thank you for the attention.”

“Of course I could have written,” continued Lady Lyndon, as if answering the thoughts, instead of words, of Mrs. Welby; “but I did not wish to stand on ceremony with a person so well known to me and my family by name as Mr. Welby. I hope I shall not be intruding on his time, if he is at home, in requesting to see him?”

“Oh! yes, certainly,” said the Rector’s wife, a little puzzled how to proceed, as it was a standing rule in the house that on Saturday morning the master should on no account be intruded on till he had made his appearance at luncheon.

“Perhaps I shall be disturbing him—I fear I may have come too early,” said the lady visitor, again diving beneath the surface, and dealing rather with what she saw there than on the surface.

“Not at all,” replied Mrs. Welby, with all

requisite civility. "I will, if you will excuse me for a minute, go to my husband, and apprise him of the honour you have done him in calling."

Lady Lyndon merely bowed in reply; and then, seeming to observe Winnie for the first time, said, as Mrs. Welby was leaving the room—

"Your daughter, I suppose, Mrs. Welby?"

"Oh! no—I have no daughter—I am not so fortunate," replied the childless woman, with a sudden gasp of bitter recollection, which told at once the sad story of her bereavement, and made Lady Lyndon say quickly,

"Then I must beg an introduction, and shall hope to have the pleasure of making this young lady's acquaintance while you are absent."

The desired introduction soon took place, and Winnie, well pleased, was left to entertain, or be entertained by, the Lady of Lyndon, whose much-desired acquaintance had thus fallen so unexpectedly in her way—wishing, at the same time, to stay and improve it, and

hardly less to run home and proclaim the wondrous fact without further loss of time.

Winnie, now that Lady Lyndon's face, as well as attention, was turned towards her, had the opportunity of judging better what that lady's claims might be as to the rare beauty of which she, in common with others, had so frequently heard. At the same time, be it remarked that Winnie looked anxiously only for the *remains* of such good looks as Lady Lyndon might have once possessed, for with her acknowledged forty years, she was utterly *passée*, if not aged, in the young girl's estimation. Well, Winnie thought as she looked, she must have been very pretty once. Though very pale, her features were small and regular, and her hair still bright and of a beautiful chestnut colour—almost matching the peculiar colour of her eyes, which had a certain far-seeing expression in them, that made Winnie fancy she looked past people's words into their thoughts.

“So you are Captain Tempest's granddaughter, I suppose?” were the first words

spoken by the lady after she had heard her name, as she looked steadily into Winnie's fresh pretty face, and appeared to be reading what it said, or did not say.

"Yes, Captain Tempest was my grandfather. Did you know him? Some people called him the Admiral, though he never was a real admiral. I suppose he ought to have been one."

"I have heard of him," returned Lady Lyndon, quietly; and then added a moment afterwards, "But I have never made his acquaintance—you know, we have never lived here."

"Yes, I know; but I thought—" and then Winnie stopped, for she hardly knew what she thought, except that she should have liked to ask a good many questions, now she had the opportunity.

It did not, however, appear that Lady Lyndon intended to gratify Winnie's curiosity, for she turned upon her instead, and began asking her several questions as to brothers and sisters, and soon elicited the simple story of Winnie's

uneventful life, and the position of domestic affairs as they stood at that time.

There was not, however, much time for conversation of any sort, as Mrs. Welby shortly returned, apologising for her absence, but saying her husband would be glad to see Lady Lyndon, and perhaps she would prefer going to Mr. Welby's study ?

Lady Lyndon caught at the thoughtful proposition with a look of relief that showed it was the very thing she most desired. No doubt it would be far more satisfactory to meet for the first time her late husband's early friend, and talk to him without witnesses. Winnie Tempest was therefore, for the time being, disappointed in her hope of improving her acquaintance with the Lady of Lyndon.

Mr. Welby made his appearance about half an hour after, and said he was requested by his late visitor to make her apologies to his wife for having left the house without saying goodbye.

“ But the fact was, my dear, the poor lady

seemed a good deal upset in talking of poor Sir Montague; and you may suppose it was to speak of him she sought me. So, when she went away, she said she did not feel equal to more conversation with strangers this morning, and would come and call again another day."

"And in the meantime we must go and call on her," said his wife; "and I hope Lady Lyndon will soon cease to look upon us as strangers."

"And me too," put in Winnie, who never liked to be left out. "I shall make aunts call there very soon next week."

"Yes, there will be plenty of callers then on the lady," said Mrs. Welby, meditatively.

"Yes; and on her daughter too. I wanted so to ask about her, though I had not time. But she has a daughter!" exclaimed Winnie.

"Yes, she has; and a son also," remarked Mr. Welby, after a pause.

"Did you hear anything about the young people, James?" asked the wife.

"Very little. I asked after them, and Lady

Lyndon said they were not here, but she expected them soon."

"Where can they be?" asked Mrs. Welby, with a little accent of surprise.

"Oh! only on a visit to some friend or relation of their father's, Lady Lyndon said. She came down quite alone two days ago."

"Then that is the reason," remarked Winnie, triumphantly, "why nothing has been heard of their coming. If there had been three of them, of course people at the station would have known who they were, and everybody would have heard that they were come; but, Lady Lyndon coming alone, no one noticed it, since the family at the Court have been dropping in, as it were, for some time past; and Lady Lyndon dresses so quietly, it might have been her own maid."

"Only you may depend upon it, Winnie, she would have been much smarter," said Mr. Welby with a good-natured smile.

"Yes, and younger too, I daresay," said Winnie. Then, as no one answered her, she

continued—"But do you think Lady Lyndon has ever been so *very* handsome as Mr. Denbigh says?"

"I think she is very handsome now," said both Mr. and Mrs. Welby.

Winnie forbore further remark, as she considered reflections on age might not be considerate under the circumstances, as Mr. and Mrs. Welby must both of them have been older even than Lady Lyndon, though, thought she to herself—"They are both such good dears, they do not care how old or how ugly they may be—not that they are anything but very nice."

It was not till after the departure of their young favourite that the Welby pair discussed with greater freedom their guest of that day.

"And how did you like her, James?" asked Mrs. Welby a little anxiously.

"Well," returned the good man, pondering, "I can hardly pass judgment in such a short time and under the circumstances. There was nothing in any way to dislike or find fault with.

I was struck with the extreme affection she appeared to entertain for the memory of her husband ; and it was about a monument in this church that she was so anxious to consult me. You know he was buried at the place near the sea-coast in Devonshire where they lived, and where they lost their eldest son. It appears Sir Montague particularly desired to be buried there also——”

“ Yes, I remember ; and we wondered at the time they did not bring the poor boy here, to the family vault.”

“ That was Lady Lyndon’s doing. She said the long journey under the circumstances would have had a very bad effect on Sir Montague’s health, for he had been failing for some years ; so she persuaded him to let the funeral take place there.”

“ I almost wonder Lady Lyndon likes to leave the place, then.”

“ Well, she gave me to understand that she considered it her duty to come here and see after the old family place, everything being left so entirely in her hands.”

“ Ah ! did she allude to that, James ? I know you have never liked *that* ; and it does seem very hard on the young man—the present Sir Vere—don’t you think so, husband ?”

“ I do not know what to think yet, Patience, and I shall give no opinion on the subject till I know more about them all.”

CHAPTER VI.

WINNIE'S ardour in making Lady Lyndon's acquaintance abated a little, and her zeal in urging her aunts to make the desired call cooled down a little when she found that neither son nor daughter was yet arrived at the family place; and she wondered not a little at the mother caring to make her first appearance there alone. Still the visit had to be paid, and the Miss Tempests saw no reason for delaying it until the expected arrival of the young people.

In pursuance of this intention, at an early day after Lady Lyndon's first appearance at church, the Miss Tempests sent to order the fly from "The Dragon;" and seated therein with

Winnie *vis-à-vis*, they proceeded in state to make their first call on the Lady of Lyndon.

Winnie was somewhat impatient, during the interval that elapsed between ringing the door-bell and the answering of the summons, as to whether the lady would be at home, fervently hoping that they might not have had their drive in vain.

"We might just as well have walked, except for the look of the thing," said Winnie, peering anxiously out as she heard the door thrown back, and saw two servants standing with imposing gravity on either side of the portal. "And then it will be so provoking just to have the little drive back and none the better for it."

Winnie, happily, was not doomed to disappointment. Lady Lyndon was "at home." Winnie sprang from the carriage with a suppressed exclamation of delight, but followed her aunts with becoming decorum into the presence chamber.

There was not much space or opportunity

to make any observations *en passant*, for they were just conducted across the hall, and immediately ushered into a sitting-room, or sort of library, where at that moment Lady Lyndon was engaged with other visitors. The Miss Tempests were particularly pleased at finding these consisted of Lady Fullerton and her daughter, and Winnie was equally well satisfied to find Edith Hampden was also of the party.

“So glad to see you here,” said Penelope, in an aside to Lady Jane, after the first introductory speeches had been made, and Lady Lyndon, having welcomed her newly-arrived guests with grave courtesy, resumed her conversation with Lady Fullerton, at the same time endeavouring to include Miss Tempest, who was nearest to her, in it.

“You would have seen us, I hope, in any event,” returned Lady Jane to Penelope. “My mother proposed taking the Cabin on our way home. We have got Edith on a visit, and she was impatient to see her old friend Winnie.”

The two girls meanwhile found plenty to

say to each other, whilst the elder ladies improved their acquaintance with Lady Lyndon. There was something rather peculiar in the measured way in which that lady accorded her attention in turn to all her visitors, bestowing on each, from time to time, when not engaged in conversation, a sort of scrutinizing regard that would fain have made itself acquainted with the inner characteristics of each individual then and there present. On the two girls at one time she bestowed a very fixed attention, as they chatted eagerly together, all unconscious of the observation of the lady of the house.

There happened to be some fine old china in the room, and to examine this the Dowager did most seriously incline, whilst the two elder Miss Tempests lent willing ears to all the information she brought to bear on the subject, Lady Jane meanwhile standing listlessly by, whilst her mother expatiated at length on the exceeding beauty and rarity of the tall china jars in question. Poor Lady Jane, quiet and unconcerned as she might appear outwardly, there was

nevertheless a strange tumult of romance within, recalling in vivid remembrance the story of her first and only love, for that man whose picture she now gazed on for the first time, and in the presence of his widow, the woman for love of whom he had forsaken and cruelly wounded her trusting heart. And then the poor lady's eyes travelled searchingly round the room he had once inhabited; and thence she gazed without, where, from the long low window, a wide stretch of pleasure-ground, with an extensive view of the beautifully-wooded park beyond, was visible. Of all she there saw she had once fully hoped and looked forward to be the happy possessor. "Happy," not on account of the richness of the possession, but because of her exceeding love of him who owned all those proud domains.

Meanwhile the Lady of Lyndon had stolen quietly up to the two young girls, almost unseen by them, and taking advantage of the first pause in their conversation, said quietly, addressing herself to Winnie,

"I think I saw you a few days ago at Mrs. Welby's house?"

Winnie looked quickly round and answered,
"Oh! yes. Did not you know it was I?"

Lady Lyndon smiled as she replied,

"I must plead guilty to having forgotten the circumstance, till I heard you speak, and then I remembered your voice."

Winnie winced a little at that remark, for she was well aware her voice was not her strong point of attraction. She had not lived at school nearly two-thirds of her life without having been enlightened on that head. Had she been brought up at home, no doubt she would have remained in happy ignorance of that defect—seeing her aunts indulged in a blind faith as to her perfections. As it was, Winnie was enlightened enough to feel uncomfortable, for she became suddenly aware that her not very melodious voice had risen to its highest compass during her lively conversation with Miss Hampden, and as it was naturally pitched too high for melody, felt uncomfortably sure that Lady

Lyndon's remark was by no means complimentary. As Winnie was naturally candid, and in the habit of saying what came uppermost into her mind (another crying defect in the eyes of her late preceptress), she immediately made answer, with a half laugh, to cover her embarrassment,

"I fear I have been talking rather too loud ; but I was so glad to see Edith—I did not know she was here."

"Oh ! no, not at all," said Lady Lyndon. "I only meant to say that I remember people more by their voices than their faces—which is not wonderful, as I am short-sighted."

"Oh ! then," thought Winnie to herself—"I daresay that is the reason Lady Lyndon looks so steadfastly at people, as if she were trying to read their hearts and thoughts, and she only wants to see and remember their faces. No wonder she forgot mine !"

Still, Winnie was quite aware that her face was a very pretty one, and quite worthy of remembrance. Then Lady Lyndon passed on to

Edith, and looking full into the sweet, open, but by no means beautiful face, said,

“I think you are like your cousins, whom we met at Rome three years ago.”

“Am I? I suppose you mean Constance and Audrey? They were there with my uncle and aunt three years ago—and you knew them, then?”

“No, I did not know them, but saw them occasionally. I was not able at that time to go into society, and therefore my knowledge of them was entirely confined to seeing them occasionally walking or driving.”

“Oh! yes, I suppose so,” said Miss Hampden hastily, fearing to recall a time which, from her husband’s rapidly-declining health, must have been so painful to Lady Lyndon; and then she went on rapidly—“You would not have seen them much in society, for Constance was hardly out, and Audrey not at all. They are not very pretty, but very nice—”

“Yes, of course,” returned Lady Lyndon, with a smile of dubious meaning. “I heard

they were pleasant girls from my son, Sir Vere. He met them occasionally, I believe."

Lady Lyndon here looked full into Edith's face, as if waiting for a reply, but none came—at least, for a minute; and then, feeling the questioning gaze bent upon her, Edith looked up and said,

"I do not know. I did not see them for some time after they came home, and heard very little about the people they had seen at Rome, not being out then. I suppose they did not much notice who came to the house."

"And my son, being quite a youth at that time, and travelling with a tutor, they were hardly likely to honour him with much attention."

"Was he not with you, then?" asked Edith in her turn, more by way of something to say than from any interest in the subject.

"Only for a short time," returned the lady. "We left him there when we returned to England. Sir Vere did not return home till the following year."

"Ah!" thought the young girl, "and that was the time of his father's death. What a painful subject for us to have touched upon!" And then, whilst she sought with kindly sympathy to give a pleasanter turn to the conversation, a new arrival was announced, which was hailed with general satisfaction. This was no other than Mr. Denbigh and his son Bertram. Lady Lyndon turned quickly to welcome the new-comers. It was evidently the first time she had seen Mr. Denbigh since she had arrived at the Court, though possibly not since the death of her husband.

No two people could be more unlike than the father and son, and they differed in more respects than general appearance. Mr. Denbigh was a small, short, well-made man, with a remarkably pleasant smile and gentlemanly address, much liked by his immediate neighbours and people in general. Bertram was not so popular, though he could be agreeable enough when it suited him to take the trouble. He was a much taller, finer-looking man than his

father, and perfectly aware of all the advantages he possessed in every respect. He had no peculiar or distinguishing traits of any kind. It rather remained to be proved what he was likely to turn out. Between him and his father there had always existed the warmest attachment that could be entertained by either.

When the Denbighs were announced, Lady Fullerton deliberately removed the gold-mounted spectacles through which she had been minutely inspecting the beautiful china vases, and, having restored them to their velvet receptacle, duly placed them in the pocket of her dress; then shaking her shawl and skirts into perfect order, she turned to the Miss Tempests with a sort of amused smile, and observed, *sotto voce*—

“I thought Charles Denbigh would not lose much time in finding his way here.”

“Like ourselves,” returned Lady Jane, in the same subdued tone of voice.

“Nonsense, Jane!” said the Dowager, impa-

tiently; "rather a different case, I imagine, eh, Miss Tempest?"

"I should think so," replied the spinster lady, thus addressed, and feeling herself called upon for an opinion, added, "Why, dear Lady Jane, *we* only call as neighbours."

"I should think we are *all* neighbours," replied Lady Jane, with a glance in the direction of the master of Nether Hall, who having stopped by the lady of the house, seemed too much engrossed by what he was saying to pursue his way towards the group of ladies assembled at the other end of the room, but whose presence he had acknowledged by a friendly bow as he entered the apartment.

Lady Fullerton looked slightly impatient of this unusual neglect on the part of their nearest neighbour, and one whom she had hitherto considered as especially bound to pay particular attention to herself and daughter—not, it may be said, from a wish to establish any nearer tie between them. Whatever the Dowager's feelings and intentions in that respect might have

been in former days, she had long ceased to build any hopes or expectations on Mr. Denbigh as a future son-in-law. He and Lady Jane so evidently looked upon each other as friends, and nothing more, that the Dowager was also content to take Mr. Denbigh—or Charles Denbigh, as, in virtue of early acquaintance, she sometimes called the middle-aged man—on the same footing.

Besides, Lady Fullerton would have felt the giving up of her daughter as a serious inconvenience and discomfort to herself. She was a woman who required a constant companion. If her daughter had married and left her, she must have provided herself with a paid companion, which would not have suited her in any way. So altogether, the Dowager was wont to declare she was very glad Lady Jane had never married, for it would have been a great loss to herself. Once Penelope Tempest ventured to remark,

“But surely, dear Lady Fullerton, it would be a great comfort to you when—I mean—at

last—that is when you must leave your daughter, to know that she had a husband to care for and love her in your place."

"I don't see that at all, if it's my death you are thinking about. Jane can take just as good care of herself as if she had married, and better perhaps ; and I never trouble myself in looking forward, there is plenty of trouble without it—and after all she might chance to die first—so notwithstanding all you say, Miss Penelope, I shall keep my daughter with me as long as I can."

"And I am sure I don't see how she could be better off," said Arethusa, "for whilst a woman is single she can go her own way, and there's no knowing what a man's way may be, let him be ever so complaisant before marriage."

"Ah, well, my dear, as you can't speak from experience there is no use in talking about it," returned the Dowager, perversely turning upon her faithful ally, as was sometimes her wont ; but the Miss Tempests were too well versed in her ways to mind either her sayings or doings,

and for the most part they gave their old friend considerable licence, which she did not scruple to avail herself of in many ways, particularly in speech.

CHAPTER VII.

BERTRAM DENBIGH, meanwhile, found his way to that part of the room where the two girls were sitting together, and there he seemed well disposed to remain.

Pleasant as the situation might appear, and easy as it no doubt was to keep up a conversation with both, still, had all been known of the young man's position with each young lady, it might have appeared that there was some little tact required on his part, as well as boldness, in venturing single-handed to the encounter.

Both of the girls looked pleased when they saw his approach, but Winnie Tempest looked by far the most conscious. Edith's greeting was open and cordial—they had been friends

and playfellows as long as either could remember ; they were “ Barry ” and “ Edith ” to each other, even after the occasional absences, longer or shorter, which of late years had made long breaks in their childish acquaintance. There was, however, no one in that room—with the exception of Lady Lyndon and Winnie—that did not look on the two as being eventually destined for each other. Mr. Denbigh and Lady Jane—to whom Edith was as a daughter—although they had never spoken openly on the subject, yet both entertained the same hope in the depths of their hearts ; and it seemed so natural, and altogether suitable, that Bertram Denbigh should fall in love with and marry Edith Hampden, that the Dowager looked upon the event only as a question of time ; and as such, had communicated her opinions and expectations to the elder Miss Tempests, by whom it had been duly received and endorsed amongst other articles of their faith and earnest belief.

No one had, however, talked to Winnie on

the subject; and she was inclined to have her own little private opinion thereon.

It was certainly a topic neither she nor her friend Edith had ever as yet discussed; and since Winnie returned home "for good," as she called it, she was but little inclined to do so.

It was very certain that after her brother Fitz's arrival, now some three months back, she had seen more of Bertram Denbigh than in the whole course of their former acquaintance. The Miss Tempests, her aunts, would have said, that it was very natural the two young men who had known each other as boys should like to meet often; and they rejoiced over the companionship, as tending so much to Fitz's enjoyment and advantage, during the few months he was likely to remain with them.

Neither Arethusa nor Penelope for a moment suspected that Winnie's sweet shady eyes and charming little kittenish ways, despite the unmusical voice—the rosy mouth, and pretty little teeth visible within, were quite a sufficient set-off against that—were altogether

more attractive to their rich neighbour's handsome son than even Fitz himself, with his pleasant sailor-like ways, good-looking face, and gentlemanly feelings.

When Bertram came, as he often did, to see Fitz, the little sister was never far distant; and the three were in the habit of rambling about the fields near the Cabin, together—but rarely in the more public paths—and often idling away their time in that same boat-house which had been the old sea-captain's special pride and pleasure both to construct and to occupy.

As Winnie was allowed full leisure to come and go as she thought proper, particularly under Fitz's care and escort, her aunt never gave a thought to the increasing intimacy with Bertram Denbigh. Besides, was he not already appropriated and bespoken by their dear friend the Dowager, who destined him for the husband of her own charming granddaughter, Edith Hampden? Treasonable indeed would have been the thought that could have rebelled

against such a very natural and proper arrangement.

It is but justice to Winnie to say that as yet she entertained no design or speculations on the subject; and yet, what girl can be entirely ignorant that she is an object of admiration, if not love, under such circumstances? Still the idea had never shaped itself into a definite form in Winnie's mind; nor had she asked her own heart what part it took in the proceeding.

It is a patent fact that brothers are proverbially blind to the effect of their sisters' charms on strangers, and Fitz, who had hitherto laughed at the tender passion, as regarded himself and others, never for a moment dreamt or suspected his little child-like sister of being either the subject or object of the same. Winnie had, besides, seen very little of Barry Denbigh before Fitz came home. It is true he had cast some passing glances of admiration on her whenever Winnie had happened to cross his path; but that had been too seldom to make much im-

pression on either. Neither was he a visitor (except on very rare occasions, when coaxed there by his father) at the Cabin. As a child he had explored and admired the curiosities contained therein, but those had long ceased to attract; so in fact the real acquaintance with Winnie Tempest only dated back a few weeks. And Edith's? Well, if she cared for Bertram Denbigh, she had not as yet made the discovery; and as for their acquaintance, as has been already said, it dated back to the earliest ages of both. No doubt he liked Edith—nay, he always had entertained a species of affection for his little playfellow at the Grove. But it may be said, though he was very willing to engage in a flirtation, he had no serious thoughts of matrimony at that time. He left that to his father and Lady Jane, who were both at that time carefully and anxiously watching for further tokens of the development of their pet plan. Though no word had been spoken between them on the subject, still Mr. Denbigh had from time to time dropped little words and

directed looks which were very suggestive of the course his thoughts and wishes were taking in regard to the two young people.

On the present occasion, soon after his little colloquy with Lady Lyndon had ended, he made his way across the room, taking a chair, which happened to be vacant, by Lady Jane, who was sitting apart, looking at some engravings. He wished to draw a sympathising glance from her towards the young people, whom he believed to be so well and happily engaged at the other end of the room, thinking, at the same time, what a stupid little thing that Winnie Tempest was not to see how utterly *de trop* she must be with his son and Edith Hampden.

It never occurred to Mr. Denbigh, with his quick eye for female beauty, that Winnie had grown into a very pretty little girl, with whom any young man might find pleasure in conversing. But then Mr. Denbigh held Winnie's conversational powers in great contempt, as indeed he did those of her aunts, to whom,

although good-natured and neighbourly, he was not particularly partial. He made a skilful detour to avoid these two ladies, and, addressing himself to Lady Jane, said,

“I am glad to see you have got your niece at last. I hope she is come to make some stay?”

“I hope so too,” returned Lady Jane, her eye unconsciously following in the same direction as Mr. Denbigh’s, till they rested on the young pair, whom they supposed to be lovers, with Winnie sitting patiently beside them. As Lady Jane did so, her thoughts perhaps went with her friend’s, for she looked up and smiled in answer to his unspoken words, at the same time remarking, “How pretty her little friend is growing!”

“Is she? Not in a style that I admire; or that I imagine Barry does either.”

“Ah! it is well there is a diversity of tastes as well as looks.” Then, reverting to her niece, Lady Jane added, “Yes, we have got Edith at last, for a comfortable visit, I hope.”

“Will not she be wanted soon at home, as

usual, to do something for everybody there?" asked Mr. Denbigh, with a little smile, that expressed a great deal.

"No—there is a general holiday at Stoney Marsh. My brother and his wife, with their second daughter, are gone on a round of visits, which happen to have occurred very opportunely."

"Yes—to introduce the beauty," put in Mr. Denbigh.

"Well, yes. I am glad Georgina has the opportunity of taking her daughter out herself—it is so much the best introduction for a girl; and then the boys are gone to school, and the little girls are sent to the sea-side with their old nurse for a month, so you see Edith is very fairly at liberty to come to us."

"Yes, I see, and am very glad it is so. You must, please, bring her to our house next week. We expect some friends on a visit, and I want Lady Fullerton to fix her own day or days for dining with us, and you will come, I hope, and bring your niece?"

"We shall all like it very much, I am sure; but I think we must be going now. I see my mother is looking round for me, so I must go and break up the conference there."

"Only to be renewed again, I trust, at a very early period."

"Well, I daresay it will not be long before we all meet again," said Lady Jane, good-naturedly, as she arose at her mother's signal, at the same time looking across the room towards her niece.

She would have been exceedingly surprised could she have glanced into the private thoughts of her young friend Barry Denbigh, for whom she felt a sort of compassionate sympathy as Edith rose to her look, prepared to leave the young man to be entertained by "that stupid little thing, Winnie Tempest."

Mr. Bertram Denbigh had been making the best use of the short space of time allotted to him, and doing double duty, as it were, with great tact and good taste. The chief part of the conversation had been carried on between

himself and his old playfellow, Edith Hampden, whom he now met for the first time after an unusually prolonged separation. All was open cordiality and unreserved pleasure on the part of the girl, who took up their acquaintance just where she had left it, and had in consequence much to tell, and a great deal to ask of her old friend.

Barry had taken up his position, leaning against the end of the couch on which the two girls were seated, and close by the side of Edith, at the same time commanding an excellent side-view of Winnie's delicate little profile and pencilled brows, and had the satisfaction, on any especial appeal being made to her, of seeing the long lashes lifted and a pleased, shy little glance directed towards him; for which, be it said, he watched and waited with a degree of eagerness all unsuspected by the young lady with whom he was meanwhile carrying on that animated conversation, or indeed by any of the group at the further end of the room, on whom his back was happily turned. In fact, Winnie herself was

the only person present cognizant of the fact, and was duly impressed and delighted by it. Her own share in the talk was of the smallest, and when she did speak her voice was sunk to its lowest possible pitch out of a whisper ; which circumstance Edith observing, and contrasting with her previous volubility as well as audibility, naturally concluded her little friend felt shy and ill at ease with the handsome young man at her side.

Therefore did Edith, with the good-nature and kind consideration which were part of herself, endeavour to draw the two together, and try to raise the tone of the low responses given. At last Edith, obedient to her summons, rose to go ; and then Bertram followed his father's example in making his petition to Edith to join their intended party next week, and heard with apparent satisfaction the girl's frank acknowledgment of how much she should enjoy it, and would persuade her grandmother and aunt to come, saying—

“ Though I am sure you must know there is

nowhere grandmamma and Aunt Jane like going so much as to Mr. Denbigh's."

"Yes," replied Bertram laughing, "I have heard Lady Fullerton say she liked dining at our house better than any other in the neighbourhood, because—it was the *nearest*."

"Ah! grandmamma hates a long drive; but, for all that, I am sure she would like to come, even if Nether Hall were a little further."

"Well, I am rejoiced it is not," returned Bertram. "It is well never to try our friends too severely, or measure the extent of their regard for our society by the sacrifices they will make to enjoy it. Only *come*, and we will be quite satisfied with our share of the pleasure."

"Are you ever coming, Edith?" said the Dowager, looking back from the doorway through which she was sailing, and somewhat chafed that her granddaughter was too much absorbed in her parting words to Bertram Denbigh to observe that she was actually leaving the room. Edith, rather self-convicted at the circumstance, with a hasty good-bye to Bertram,

walked quickly up to make her adieux to Lady Lyndon, and then fortunately overtook the deliberate steps of the Dowager ere she had crossed the hall, on her way to the carriage.

“And so you are going to be very gay next week,” said Winnie, with a little wistful sigh for the first time, voluntarily addressing the young man as he turned round to her when Edith had disappeared.

“What you would call gay, Winnie, I dare-say,” he replied, calling her by the name Fitz was wont to do, and himself also when no one else was by to hear and note.

“It must be very pleasant. I wish aunts gave dinner-parties. You never go out to tea-parties, Mr. Denbigh?”

“No; they are not much in my way; but under some circumstances I could fancy their being pleasant enough.”

“Oh! no, they are stupid—so very, very dull. Fitz never will go to them, though Aunt Are-thusa often wants him very much; but he al-

ways manages to make some excuse; and I really do not wonder at it," said Winnie thoughtfully, as if considering the exigencies of the case.

"Well, I hope he will not excuse himself dining with us next week," said Bertram. "I wish you could come with him—eh, Winnie?"

"Oh! do you think I might? Perhaps if you asked Aunt Penelope they would let me."

"Upon consideration, I do not think it *would* do," said Barry, who had just decided in himself that he had much better keep Winnie's company and conversation for more private occasions; and following up that thought, he added immediately after—"And now I must go and do a little civil talk to Lady Lyndon—I have not spoken to her yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

EVER since Winnie was quite a little girl in her aunt's house, she could remember the delight of going to spend a day at the Grove, to play with Edith Hampden, on her occasional visits to her grandmother. Nor did the pleasure fade at all as both the girls grew older, and their meetings became less frequent. Edith was the elder of the two by nearly two years, still she was always good-natured and pleased to see her little playfellow ; but it was on Winnie's side that the great happiness was felt when those days of high festival occurred, and she had by far the keenest sense of enjoyment on the occasion.

The acquaintance continued as the two girls

grew up ; but it was a very one-sided friendship, —for in that sentiment, as in love, there is generally a preponderance of regard on one side or the other between the worshipper and the worshipped, but not the less durable perhaps for that. Some natures like to look up, and will attach themselves with a blind idolatry to one who merely tolerates them on that account.

No doubt Edith Hampden's was by far the superior nature and loftier character of the two ; and Winnie was quite aware of it, and experienced a reflected sense of honour and glory in the admiration and affection she so freely lavished on her friend.

Winnie had formed no especial school friendships. She had been considered there as backward and childish, and certainly always preferred a game of play with the younger children to more intellectual or less edifying pursuits and conversations with the elder girls. Thus Winnie retained the full fervour of her early love and admiration for Edith Hampden, and she, on her side, was very kind and tolerant of the affection

bestowed upon her; but she had too many claimants on her regard to be able to concentrate any overwhelming proportion on poor Winnie Tempest.

Lady Fullerton was not a good-natured or even considerate person. She would not have thought of asking Winnie because the girl was lonely in her home as regarded young people, or because the Miss Tempests, her aunts, were friends of her own, whom she encouraged to come for her own amusement. It was only when Lady Jane suggested that the child should be asked to come and play with Edith that the Dowager gave an indifferent assent, and seldom troubled herself to notice the little girl when she did come, except it might happen that in the exuberance of youthful spirits Winnie's voice was too highly pitched for the sensitive ears of Lady Fullerton, when she would snapishly remark on the torment of having noisy children in the room.

It had therefore happened that when Bertram Denbigh had been available as a play-

fellow for Edith, Winnie's company had been dispensed with, and the two had never been in the habit of meeting at the Grove. The Dowager petted and encouraged the handsome boy, and tolerated even more noise, in the course of the games he saw fit to pursue, than the utmost stretch of poor Winnie's unmusical voice could have perpetrated. None of these things, however, had ever disturbed or discomfited Winnie. She was happily not over-sensitive or even self-conscious. She continued just as well pleased at seventeen to receive an occasional invitation to the Grove to meet Edith, as she had been at seven when their acquaintance first began. Past experience had taught her not to expect very much notice from Lady Fullerton ; and even Lady Jane, though invariably kind to Winnie when present, was rather oblivious of her when absent.

Thus the days went by after that visit to Lady Lyndon which had been one of unqualified delight to Winnie, both as regarded love and friendship. Every day the girl kept hop-

ing for some sign of recollection from one or other of her friends. But it was evident they had enough to do without Winnie, and the poor child came to the conclusion that it was very natural it should be so, thinking to herself that as "they" were going to be so gay at the Hall it was not likely Bertram Denbigh would find any spare time to come and call at the Cabin ; and of course Edith would be going there, and plenty of other places—but perhaps she should be asked to the Grove when it was all over. So Winnie with much faith and patience bided her time. It was some comfort to her that Fitz was not apparently as much forgotten as herself. He had been asked to stay two days at Nether Hall, and to dine and shoot there besides ; and pleasure to Fitz was pleasure to Winnie also. But when she wanted Fitz to tell her all about it, Fitz made a very lame story—he had evidently no material wherewith to spin a yarn—or at least such a yarn as his little sister might find satisfactory. His principal enjoyment was in the shooting parties ; and he had met

an old friend of his who had been a fellow mid with him when he first went to sea.

"I would have got him to come down here," said Fitz, "only he was due the end of the week, and must be back at his ship."

Then Winnie asked the names of the people staying at Nether Hall, but of these Fitz had not taken much heed, and his account was rather vague and unsatisfactory.

"And did your friend go out with you every day?" asked Winnie, after a pause.

"Yes, he came down for the shooting ; it is a pity he could not stay longer."

"Oh, I don't mean Walter Bingham," replied Winnie, with a little confusion, and adopting Fitz's friends by name as her own also, "I mean, of course, the friend I know best, Mr. Bertram Denbigh."

"Oh ! it's Barry you mean. Yes, of course, he went out every day ; he is a good fellow, but Bingham is more in my way than he is. We have scrambled on together, and been in the same boat—to say nothing of ship—scores of

times, in the past years ; now everything about Denbigh is all tip-top, ship-shape ; he has got everything in the world he wants, and can get everything else besides that he doesn't want ; so we have not quite so much in common, though he is very kind and friendly, and all that, but not the same as old Walter and me. He is a nephew of Mr. Denbigh's, which I never knew before, for this is the first time he has been in these parts."

"How I should like to see him!" said the little sister, sympathetically.

"Well, next time he comes you shall, pussy. Now shall we walk over to the Grove and call on her high mightiness, Lady Fullerton, and her pretty granddaughter, whose acquaintance, I forgot to tell you, I made or improved at Nether Hall."

"But I am not asked to go," said Winnie.

"Do not you ever venture to make a morning call, unless specially invited so to do ?" asked her brother.

"Well, I go to Mrs. Welby whenever I like,

and a few other people, and should go with aunts, if they asked me, to the Grove, but I never go there of myself."

"Well, set your mind at ease ; Miss Hampden asked me when you were coming to see her; and when I replied I would bring you some day, she said something about the sooner the better. So you see you are not pledged to anything, and may go or stay away at your own pleasure."

"I am sure, then, it will be my pleasure to go ; so please, Fitz, dear, let us set off this very afternoon, as soon as possible."

"Gently," replied Fitz, musing. "You need not be in quite so great a hurry ; give them a little breathing time to get home—they were only to return to the Grove this morning."

"I did not know they were staying at the Hall."

"Yes. The old lady does not like going out at night, so where she dines, she sleeps—and all the rest of it ; but I will take you there all in good time some day soon."

So with that promise Winnie was fain to be content; and a very few days after saw the brother and sister setting off on their walk. It was a fine day in the early autumn, before the trees have begun to change, or the general dreariness around warns you that winter is at hand. There was not much sunshine—only occasional gleams, which lighted up every distant object, and made beautiful partial lights and shadows in the varying landscape. The brother and sister left the town and high road, preferring to walk through the fields and low meadow-land which lay behind Hilborough. The way was circuitous, and they made it longer still, at Winnie's petition, as she begged Fitz to go by the fields which sloped down to the river's edge, wanting to show Fitz the flowering rush, and see if the blue "forget-me-not" was still in bloom.

On went the young pair, happy in wandering about together idly by the way, and somewhat forgetful of time as it flew rapidly by.

"I am so glad we came this way," said

Winnie, as she scrambled up a bank down which she had ventured to the water's edge, to secure a bunch of the beautiful myosotis.

"Yes; but we are going miles out of our way," said Fitz.

"Not so very far after all, for I see the windows of Lyndon Court shining through the trees, though it is a long way off; but the sun is just gleaming on them. How pretty it looks! I often long to come this way to Mrs. Welby's, but I dare not go by myself."

"Why, you little coward, what is there to hurt you here, unless you chance to slip down into the river when there is no one near to pull you out—you had rather a narrow escape just now."

"Oh! no, I was in no danger—my footing was firm enough. It is not *that* I am afraid of—only, you know, Fitz, this is Farmer Cross's meadow—all the fields about here are his."

"Well, and what is there so alarming in that circumstance, you little goose?"

"Don't you know, his cattle are often feed-

ing about, and there is a dreadful bull. Oh ! Fitz, I should die with fright if I came suddenly upon him in one of these great meadows all by myself!"

" Well, perhaps that might not be pleasant ; but you need not be afraid when you are with me. I hope I am a match for any bull on earth, Winnie," said Fitz, laughing.

" I should not like you to try, dear ; but I am not at all afraid with you, especially as I see nothing of the kind near."

" I have seen something of the kind, Winnie, in the course of my life, and have rather longed for an opportunity of trying my skill at bull tackling. I think I could treat him to a dodge or two. Why, when we were on the Spanish coast, I went up the country and saw some bull-baiting at Toledo. It was not much to my fancy ; but I thought at the time I would rather be an actor in it than a spectator, provided it was all fair play."

" I am sure I am very glad you were not, Fitz, dear, for you can never tell what you could

do till you have tried ; and I fear you would have come off the worse if you had met with a real wild bull."

"Indeed!—but I don't see that, Winnie. Why, Walter Bingham and I had the good luck to encounter one—it was a buffalo bull—when we were out on leave in South America, and taking a refreshing scramble over the prairies."

"And what did you do with him, Fitz ? Scamper away, I suppose, as fast as you could from him, horrid animal !"

"No—we scampered after him, till he got angry, and turned upon us."

"Well, how did you get away then ?"

"Well, we luckily had a rifle with us, and after a little trouble and some dodging about, we managed to shoot him ; and very proud we were of our exploit, for people there generally make a great fuss and business of hunting the buffalo, and go out a great lot together ; whereas, you see, Walter and I managed the business between ourselves."

"I think you were very lucky," said Winnie, with a long breath, and a wistful look in the young sailor's animated face. "Now, then, let us go on over the stile into the next field, and then we can cross the road past the farmhouse."

Just then the brother and sister were startled by a long clear shriek and cry which sounded like "help!" from a woman's voice, and came startlingly close, ringing through the still autumn air. Winnie clung to Fitz's arm, gazing up at him in questioning fear, whispering, "What can it be?" But another species of sound just then made itself also audible, and caused Winnie's breath to come fast, and her little heart to beat with corresponding haste. It was a low, stifled, bellowing sort of noise, such as could proceed from no other animal in the world except the one she had just been denouncing as the object of her especial dread. Again another shriek rose, filling Winnie's heart with fresh dread, whilst a short but louder angry bellow seemed to suggest that

matters (whatever might be their nature) were becoming pressing. To her trembling question of what it could be, Fitz's answer was short, sharp, and decisive—"The sooner we go and see the better."

Not a word more had been spoken between the brother and sister as they sped along the meadow by the side of the high thick hedge (which prevented them seeing into the next field) to the stile by which they meant to enter and cross it. This gained, they looked eagerly over it together; then, Fitz exclaiming, "Here's a pretty game!" sprang over at once.

The full cause of all they had heard was at once revealed to Winnie's inquiring and terrified gaze. At a distant end of the field they saw a young man and woman, both, as far as she could judge in the distance, strangers to her, as well as to Fitz. The young man was a little in advance of the lady, apparently endeavouring to shield her, as far as was possible, from the danger which every moment appeared more imminent. Just in his path, and close

upon him, stood the bull, the cause of the lady's terror—for it was from her lips the cry for help had proceeded. The animal, a large and, at that moment, a very fierce one, was evidently gaining upon the luckless people, who seemed to be endeavouring to make their way by slow degrees towards a high gate behind them. The attempt appeared very hopeless, for the bull was evidently in a dangerous mood, and ripe for mischief. He seemed to have been kept at bay for some time by the force and power of the human eye; and no doubt the gaze bent so steadily and unflinchingly upon him kept the infuriated animal in check. But that resource appeared to be failing, as the bull gained upon the young man, and was evidently lashing himself up to a more aggressive movement. His head began to be ominously lowered, his red restless eye bent on his foe, whilst his low angry bellow portended coming mischief. The case seemed very desperate, and no doubt the young man began to consider it so, for, whilst keeping his look steadily bent on the savage

brute before him, he said, in a suppressed voice,

“Get out of the way, Clare, as quickly and quietly as you can; do not stay by me any longer. You may manage to get to that gate alone. I shall do better without you. Go, there is a good girl, I entreat you!”

Then the answer came firm and steady from lips blanched with terror—“No, I shall not leave you.” And then another despairing cry for help was raised. The very sound seemed to irritate the animal, and to break the spell by which its fury had hitherto been restrained; for suddenly closing its eyes, and putting his head down almost on a level with the ground, he was on the point of making a desperate rush forward, when his energies were suddenly paralysed, and his fury turned in a fresh direction.

CHAPTER IX.

THIS timely interruption was caused by a violent blow dealt from behind, quickly followed up by a succession of similar attacks on every part of the animal's body. The creature, enraged and disappointed, and somewhat alarmed at the unlooked-for disturbance, wheeled rapidly round, looking about for his new adversary. Fitz, rather pleased with his own prowess, in having thus successfully diverted the bull's attention, slipped on one side, and continued a perfect hail of blows, which had the effect of confusing the brute's powers of perception, and then, in a lucky moment, having seized hold of his tail, continued to keep out of reach of his head, whilst with his strong, powerful arm, he continued to belabour the animal.

Fitz was happily tall and strong, and active both by nature and profession, so for a time he successfully eluded all attempts to throw him off, or otherwise attack him. It was nevertheless becoming rather fearful odds, even for his brave spirit to contend against, when, happily, good and efficient aid arrived, in the persons of two stout farming men from the yard close by, one of whom was the especial attendant and keeper of the animal at that moment exhibiting in so unpleasant and ferocious a manner. He and his companion dexterously threw some sacking over the creature's head, and a strong cord round his neck. The man then, after some resistance on the bull's part, by making his voice heard, and his hand felt, managed, even in the midst of his fury, by degrees, to lead and drag the animal away, and shut him up in his own private apartments in a yard not far distant.

Having thus disposed of his enemy, Fitz, panting, torn, and dishevelled, turned to see what had become of those he had so signally befriended. He had not far to look. The young

man was close at his elbow, having apparently accompanied him in his gyrations round the bull, and now, relieved from the imminent danger, seemed anxious to make his acknowledgments to his unknown deliverer. Fitz and he then, for the first time, looked each other in the face, whilst the young man, tendering his hand, said shortly,

“How can we thank you enough for your timely help?”

To which Fitz replied, “I have to thank you for giving me the opportunity I was just desiring of trying my skill in such a situation and upon such a creature as we have just (with sufficient help) seen vanquished.” This was said laughing, but still breathless; and then Fitz added, “I fear I should have done but little in my single person; but still it is pleasant to have had the chance of trying.”

“I fear you will feel some consequences which may not be altogether pleasant,” said Fitz’s new acquaintance, as he noticed him holding his arm as if painful.

"Nothing but a little wrench, which is not wonderful, seeing what an extraordinarily powerful brute that is. He is a magnificent fellow!"

"I can't admire him, I fear, as he deserves," said the young man, drily, "though I do not question his strength and ferocity. I fear I could not have held out as you have done, had it come to such a trial of strength between us. You managed him admirably," with a glance of admiration at Fitz's fine muscular frame and commanding stature. Fitz returned the glance, but he could not do as much for the compliment inferred in it, for the young man by his side barely exceeded middle height, and was slenderly and slightly built; all the power—if he possessed any—rested in the dark, resolute eyes, which, though deep set, suited well the thin, finely-cut features and sallow complexion. It was a peculiar face, and one that did not at first give the impression of being as handsome as it really was.

Fitz's gaze then travelled on to where the girl was standing, at a little distance from them,

and speaking to Winnie, who had reappeared after the farming men had secured their prize. It was to her that their appearance was due; for as soon as Fitz had jumped over the stile, and secured a thick stake from the hedge, and rushed to the encounter, Winnie flew like a lapwing across the further end of the field, and gaining the farm, happily secured the immediate help of the two men, who chanced fortunately to be in the way.

In spite of Fitz's state of excitement and preoccupation, he almost started as his eyes fell on the face of the girl he observed for the first time. She was, as he said afterwards to himself (he would not for the world have said anything so sentimental to anyone else, not even to Winnie), like a "poet's dream." She stood there, leaning against the trunk of a picturesque old oak, tall, and fair, and beautiful, with fine delicate features, something like the young man's, but with a transparently beautiful fair complexion, and long golden hair, falling almost to her waist. It was before the

days of chignon enormity and deformity, with tall hats and other disguises—though it is doubtful whether that girl would ever have sacrificed her taste and submitted to appear in them. Her appearance was, like the young man's, peculiar, with the long flowing hair, which was partly concealed by a pretty plain straw hat. She wore also a short red cloak, and a long training white dress completed her costume. Whilst Fitz looked and marvelled, his companion, following the direction of his eyes, said,

“I ought to introduce my sister, who is even more indebted to you than I am; and perhaps you will tell me to whom we are both so much obliged.”

“Oh, my name is Fitzgerald Tempest; and yours?”

“Lyndon.”

“Oh, I am glad of that,” said Fitz frankly, again offering his left hand. “Sir Vere Lyndon then? and Miss Lyndon? We did not know you were arrived at the Court.”

"Only two days ago," said Sir Vere. "I conclude we are neighbours, Mr. Tempest?"

"For a time," said Fitz; "but my home is more generally on the wide sea than on land."

"You are in the Navy, then?—it is a fine profession." And then the young men walked on together, to the spot where the two girls stood, still trembling with the recent terror.

"Now I must beg you and Miss Tempest to come with us to the Court," said Sir Vere, after the proper introductions had been accomplished. "There is a very short way, and I am sure you both require some rest and refreshment."

This friendly offer, however, Fitz declined, both for his sister and himself; and then, looking on his torn coat, he laughingly declared he was in no fit plight to shew himself to Lady Lyndon, or any lady who had not been a spectatress of the fight, and could on that account excuse his appearance, as the natural consequence of such an unequal combat. He thought he had better go and look up Farmer Cross, and see if he could not lend him some garment, in place

of his own torn one, in which to walk home with proper decorum and respectability.

Whilst Fitz was speaking, the person in question appeared suddenly on the scene, begging and entreating the whole party to adjourn to his house, where his “Missus” would see to the young ladies, and the gentlemen could order and have everything his place contained.

Fitz immediately accepted the farmer’s offer, with the frank cordiality which was part of his nature ; but Sir Vere, whilst he so far availed himself of it as to accompany his new acquaintance to the door, observed drily,

“ I think, Mr. Cross, you have rather exceeded a farmer’s privilege of stopping a footpath, by placing such a savage brute as that in your meadow, where there is a right of public way.”

“ Indeed, Sir Vere, it was none of my intention to do so. The brute got himself out of his place unbeknown to me and my herdsman, and though he is touchy sometimes, I may say this, in excuse, that if that lady, Miss Lyndon,

had not worn that dress, he would never, to my firm belief, have noticed you in any way."

"That is a new idea, at any rate, that Miss Lyndon must suit her dress and her colours to the taste of cattle hereabouts. I suppose you mean to object to the red cloak?"

"Not I, Sir Vere. I think it is uncommon handsome; but no bull in England can stand it, and mine's not remarkable as to temper."

"He is a magnificent animal notwithstanding," said Fitz goodnaturedly, thereby winning the good man's heart with a stroke. When they arrived at the farm-house, Winnie ran in to speak to Mrs. Cross, but Clare Lyndon drew back, saying she must say good-bye. Sir Vere also followed his sister's example, declaring at the same time how much he regretted they could not go with him and his sister to the Court, but trusting to see both Fitz and his sister there at some early day, and civilly promising to call on them meanwhile; and so the new acquaintances parted.

It may be supposed how eagerly Winnie's full

budget of news was received on her return home that same afternoon by both aunts. Many and curious were the questions asked, and hardly less animated were the replies given by their niece. As for Fitz, he had not much to say on the matter; he was rather out of love with bull-baiting, according to his present experience, as his arm was somewhat severely sprained, and he liked still less to express his opinion about the brother and sister in whose defence the injury had been incurred. And as both Arethusa and Penelope felt sure his silence was the result of bodily suffering, they would not tease him with too many questions that evening. They were satisfied with hearing all Winnie thought fit to tell them, and as the subject was naturally uppermost in her mind, she was very ready to talk as much as they desired; whilst they wondered, and shuddered, and exclaimed, and admired, and were as fully impressed by the recital almost as Winnie herself.

“I think we shall see them soon,” said Win-

nie, on having been called on for a third time to describe the brother and sister, "and then you can judge for yourselves, aunts."

"Oh! I feel sure we shall admire them both exceedingly, and of course like them as much as you do. How grateful they must all feel at the Court to our dear Fitz! But for his presence of mind and bravery, where would those two young people be now? I declare it makes one quite tremble to think of it."

"Then please, aunt, don't talk or think any more about it just at present. I have really had enough of the bull for the present," put in Fitz, who was rather tired, in spite of his pluck, and very tired, too, of the subject.

The next morning found Winnie in rather a desultory state of mind, which she relieved as best she might by wandering about in the garden during the early morning hours. It had been her determination to betake herself by times to her old friends at the Rectory, who she knew would be glad to see her, and hear

her own account of the perils of the preceding day ; besides which, Winnie hoped to receive in return a bulletin of their rescued friends at the great house. Fitz, however, stopped her early proceedings in that direction, telling Winnie, if she would wait till the afternoon, he would go with her to the Rectory ; and then added, a moment or two afterwards, in a hurried manner—

“ And after we have paid our respects there, perhaps we ought to go up to the Court, and just ask after the young lady there. I suppose it would only be civil and neighbourly.”

Nothing could suit Winnie’s inclination better than Fitz’s little programme. It quite superseded her desire to walk over to the Grove that day and see Edith Hampden. She had been almost as much impressed with the beauty of Clare Lyndon as Fitz himself. Winnie therefore fluttered about like a butterfly in the old-fashioned garden, and finding no one at liberty to idle about with her there, set

herself at last to gather flowers, with the intention of replenishing those already fading in the drawing-room flower-glasses.

Whilst busily so engaged, the time passed quickly away, and Winnie was surprised, on carrying her last basketful into the house, to see it was half-past twelve o'clock.

Just then the noise of wheels coming rapidly in the direction of the house caused Winnie to retrace her steps into the garden, from whence she could command a view of the expected visitors, whoever they might prove to be, and without being seen herself. Running to the well-known gap in the laurel hedge, which divided the garden from the little sweep up to the front of the house, Winnie, standing on tip-toe, looked carefully through, and had the satisfaction of seeing an open carriage drive past, and stop at the door of the Cabin. Winnie had no sooner cast her eyes upon the occupants of the said carriage than she flew back to the house more quickly than she came out, and

rushing through the open window into the dining-room, where Fitz was sitting busy, after his own fashion, either writing, or drawing, she called out to him—

“Oh! Fitz, come quick into the drawing-room, there’s Lady Lyndon at the door; and I daresay she is come to thank you!”

“A good reason, then, for staying away,” said Fitz, who, nevertheless, rose slowly, as if about to obey his sister’s summons; and then stopped, asking, “Do you mean Lady Lyndon is come here alone?”

“Oh! no, to be sure not; so pray come, there’s a dear fellow. The room is in such a mess with my flowers, for I had not half finished, and never thought of any one coming.”

“Just like you, untidy puss!” said Fitz, good-naturedly, and hastening with a brightened countenance to do her bidding.

Lady Lyndon was *not* alone, but Fitz could not resist a feeling of blank disappointment

when he saw she was accompanied by her son, and not her daughter; and it was certainly the latter he had hoped to see. However, he had to put the best face he could on his dissatisfaction, and receive the guests, who were already in the drawing-room; and then Winnie, having duly bid them welcome, took herself off, to find her two aunts, who were engaged in certain avocations which they considered all-important to themselves and others. Penelope was discovered in the midst of her store-room cares, though only then occupied in restoring everything to its proper place; whilst Arethusa was giving audience to half a dozen poor people, and prescribing for their physical wants and infirmities, according to the best of her abilities.

The two Miss Tempests were always tidy in their plain morning dresses, and fit to be seen, whatever their occupations might be at that early hour; so there was no further delay than that occasioned by a hasty locking-up of closets, on Penelope's part, and a brief dismissal of her

poor visitors on Arethusa's; and they were soon in the drawing-room, welcoming their new neighbours.

CHAPTER X.

IF it had been Lady Lyndon's object in making this early call—as no doubt it was—to return thanks on her absent daughter's account, that part of the business was already dispatched when the Miss Tempests entered their sitting-room. Lady Lyndon and her son were both talking to Fitz on indifferent subjects, and with as much composure as if no such adventure as that of the preceding day had ever occurred.

Perhaps the two excellent and enthusiastic aunts felt a little disappointed that this great affair was not dwelt upon more at length by Lady Lyndon or her son. They had rather expected to have been overwhelmed with the

extent of gratitude their guests would have expressed and entertained towards their gallant deliverer, Fitz; and both of the ladies had modestly determined, in the depths of their own minds, as they approached the drawing-room, to make as light of Fitz's prowess and perils as the nature of the subject would allow. No occasion was there, however, for any such reticence on their parts. Lady Lyndon only observed quietly, as they shook hands,

"We are early visitors—allow me to introduce my son, Sir Vere Lyndon—but you will suppose we are anxious to inquire after Mr. Tempest, who, I fear, hurt his arm in the service he kindly rendered my son and daughter yesterday. I daresay you have heard all about their unlucky encounter?"

"*Heard of it!*" thought Winnie; adding to herself, "I wish she could have heard aunt's talk of it yesterday evening." The Miss Tempests were by no means touchy or exacting in disposition, though Arethusa occasionally took up things a little hotly, like the old Admi-

ral ; but happily, when she did so, she dropped them more quickly. The two sisters, therefore, quietly replied that they *had* heard of the adventure, and were rejoiced there had been no worse results, as Miss Penelope added, on inquiring after Miss Lyndon,

“ My daughter is quite well, thank you ; but she is rather delicate, I therefore advised her to keep quiet this morning. My son and I are on our way to the Grove, where we have made an engagement to lunch with Lady Fullerton ;” adding, by way of explanation, “ And as we passed your gate, we thought you would excuse our calling so early to make our inquiries.”

Very civil it sounded ; but there was not much cordiality either in Lady Lyndon’s look or in her manner ; there was nothing that seemed like a wish to be better acquainted, or to take advantage of Fitz’s kindly act on her children’s behalf, to bring the young people more together. Winnie seemed likely to be left out of the affair altogether, as Lady Lyndon hardly noticed her return to the drawing-room, till

she heard Winnie's unlucky voice rather raised in some lively discussion, after she had retreated to Fitz's side, and joined in the talk going on between the two young men. At all events, the acquaintance seemed progressing better on that side of the room. Sir Vere had been remarking some sketches which hung in the room, and were done by Fitz. They were executed in a bold, clever way, but the chief charm lay in the fact that they were drawings of places well known to Sir Vere, though not such as generally lay in the tourist's way. They were chiefly in some of the remote Greek islands in the Archipelago. The two young men had both been impressed with the singular beauty of the places, and Sir Vere was inviting Fitz to come over and inspect the sketches which he had made of them. Winnie was always pleased to hear Fitz's performances admired, and finding Sir Vere was in that vein, she ran across the room and returned with the cherished scrap-book in which were enshrined so many of Fitz's early performances, chiefly in the caricaturing line;

good, no doubt, as far as they went, but requiring some knowledge of the persons, places, and occasions to enter fully into the fun.

To supply this deficiency Winnie volunteered her services, and being soon led away with her subject, and anxious to explain and point out all the little bits of local humour, Winnie's eyes and cheeks kindled, which made her look very pretty. But, alas ! at the same time her unlucky voice arose to its most inharmonious pitch, and then it was that Lady Lyndon's attention was aroused, and she looked round and remembered Winnie's existence. She did not fail also to observe at the same time that her son's eyes were bent on the eager little creature ; he was, in fact, taking an intellectual gage of the height, depth, breadth, and strength of poor Winnie's understanding—that was really all. But Lady Lyndon supposed her son was gazing on bright eyes, long lashes, flashing smiles, and rosy lips. Under that impression the lady rose hastily, saying,

“I think, Vere, we must be going, or we shall

keep Lady Fullerton's luncheon waiting." Then, making her adieux all round, and again expressing her satisfaction that the "little adventure of the preceding day had had no ill effects," she gracefully retreated from the room, followed by her son. She only made one remark, as they turned from the gate of the Cabin into the high road, and that was, "What a pity that girl has a voice like a peacock!"

"Yes," returned Sir Vere. "And I suppose, like the bird you speak of, we must excuse it because she is so handsome."

After that Lady Lyndon said no more about poor Winnie or her voice.

The two elder ladies at the Cabin watched the retreating form of Lady Lyndon as she got into her carriage, and followed the sound of the horses' steps as they died away in the distance, and then turned from the window and looked each other in the face, till both smiled.

"Well?" asked Miss Penelope of her elder and stronger-minded sister.

"Well," returned Arethusa, with a little laugh,

“if you ask my opinion, I don’t think the lady much fancies any of us !”

“Nay!—surely! But why?” said Penelope, pensively.

“I can’t tell you, Pen; but there is something about that Lady Lyndon which seems to say—‘We must be acquainted in a sort of way, as near neighbours, but so far shall you come—or go—but no further.’”

“Do you think she is proud?” asked Penelope, after a little fit of musing.

“No, I can’t say that I do; it is not that sort of vulgar feeling, Pen—because Lady Lyndon lives in a great house, and we inhabit a little cottage, that she does not like us. She is not airified or fine at all; but there is something, I cannot tell you what, that says to me, as plainly as if I saw it written in black and white—Lady Lyndon does not fancy any one of the Tempest family.”

“She did not know anything of our dear father?” asked Penelope, remembering that worthy man had, during his life-time, a peculiar

faculty for quarrelling or “rubbing against the grain,” even with those admitted to his special intimacy.

“How should she?” returned Arethusa. “Lady Lyndon was never in this part of the world before or after her marriage; and we know besides, if she had known our dear father, they must have got on well, as he was particularly partial to the family at the Court.”

“I think he liked going there, and dining there also; but I have often heard him say Sir Montague was too soft by half, and when they did magistrate’s business together, he generally opposed Sir Montague.”

“Ah! but that he did on principle with most people,” replied his eldest daughter, with a sigh of filial recollection. “His own opinions were always so very decided, and he would never bend an inch to any other person’s.”

Whilst the sisters thus recalled to memory the sterner traits of their father’s character, the deceased Admiral’s grandchildren were merrily chatting as they pursued their way to call on

Mr. and Mrs. Welby ; though it must be said the young man's pleasure in so doing was diminished by half from feeling that, knowing Lady Lyndon to be absent, they must not call on the young lady at the Court, nor inquire, as they had received the latest accounts of her well-being from her mother herself.

"Never mind," said Winnie. "I don't know that I like those Lyndons much; both Lady Lyndon and her son have a way of looking at you when you are speaking, as if you were a new kind of animal—not—not at all like Barry Denbigh," said she, with a little smile and blush.

"They are both very well in their way, I daresay," said Fitz tolerantly ; "but we are not fair judges, as we know one very well, and the other not at all; though I don't dislike what I have seen of Sir Vere."

"No; because he liked your drawings, and had been to the same places," replied Winnie, sagaciously. "There are people there," exclaimed Winnie in a whisper, stopping short

after she had walked into the Rectory-house, and going on before her brother, she was about to open the door of the sitting-room without knocking, according to her usual custom.

"I daresay they won't hurt us," answered Fitz; "so you had better go on, and not stand here whispering."

Winnie advanced, and opening the door, said—

"Are you quite at home, Mrs. Welby, or are you particularly engaged?"

"Only very pleasantly so, my dear, and very glad that you should come and partake of my pleasure. Miss Lyndon has been kind enough to come and see me, and tell me all about her terrible adventure yesterday, and our dear Fitz's presence of mind, which accomplished such wonders."

"I think in that case," said he, laughing a little, and speaking rather quickly to cover a certain amount of pleasurable confusion he was conscious of—"that the old joke of absence

of body would have been very preferable to any amount of presence of mind."

"Only in that case," said Clare Lyndon, "I do not know what would have become of us without your most fortunate presence of body as well as of mind."

"Oh! no doubt you would soon have found some one else to help—the farming people were beginning to take alarm at your cry for help," returned Fitz lightly, but at the same time with a delightful sensation of satisfaction at having been the first in the field to the rescue.

"I do not know what *might* have happened, I can only answer for what *did*; and that being the case, you must allow me to feel very grateful to you, Mr. Tempest, both on my brother's account and my own."

There was a gentle earnestness in Clare's manner of speaking that was very taking, and a deliberation in her utterance that gave a weight to the few simple sentences in which she expressed her sense of obligation to Fitz for his courageous and timely help. He no longer dis-

claimed, but only muttered something about his happiness in having been able to do her any service, and then turned the conversation into another channel.

Mr. Welby happened to be present. He seemed delighted to see Clare Lyndon, and to make her acquaintance. In her beautiful face and gentle manner, he traced the remembrance of a bygone generation. In Lady Lyndon's society he had no such associations. The daughter of his dearly-loved pupil brought back his recollection vividly, as well as that of two lovely sisters who had both died young. She had the same extreme delicacy of feature and complexion and quiet grace that was peculiar to the Lyndon family. There were other points of resemblance which impressed themselves more fully upon the worthy man's mind, as Clare Lyndon became better known to him; but even then, on that day of first introduction, he saw enough of her dead father and the long-lost sisters of his house, to make him feel far more like an old acquaintance and friend of the young girl than as a

mere casual and ordinary acquaintance. It appeared that Mr. Welby had seen Miss Lyndon by chance when calling at the Court that morning to make inquiries after hearing of the adventure of the preceding day. Clare was loitering about on the road in front of the house, after having seen her mother and brother drive off to fulfil their engagement at the Grove, where it was not Lady Lyndon's pleasure that Clare should accompany them, on the plea of fatigue, or even allow her to make one of their party in calling to return thanks *en route* at the Miss Tempests' house. Clare had intended to while away the time of their absence in sketching some of the picturesque old trees that stood grouped near the entrance, and it was whilst wandering about in quest of the most suitable for her purpose that she encountered Mr. Welby on his way, and made his acquaintance. She knew Mr. Welby perfectly well by name and character; she had often heard her father speak of him, and was well prepared to step at once over the formal barrier of new acquaint-

anceship into the more genial footing of old family friendship.

Clare Lyndon had loved her father very devotedly, far more so than many would have imagined from her very quiet and undemonstrative manner towards him. That extreme quietness and absence of animation was one of Clare's peculiar characteristics, and in some degree reminded Mr. Welby of the Miss Lyndons of a former generation. But with Clare it might have been owing quite as much to her mother's mode of bringing her up as to constitutional tendency.

On the present occasion, when meeting Mr. Welby for the first time, and on his introducing himself, being left entirely to follow her own impulses, there was no coldness or apathy visible in her reception of her dearly-loved father's old friend and tutor; whilst he, with his plain cordial manner and warm-hearted greeting, won the young girl's heart at once. She "was a Lyndon all over," he said to himself, "her father's own child." So the good rector at once

promoted her to fill the long vacant place in his affections caused by that lamented father's removal. There was little persuasion required when Mr. Welby (finding Miss Lyndon expected to be alone till the evening), begged her to walk with him across the park and make his wife's acquaintance, and have her luncheon at the Rectory instead of by herself at the Hall.

"Mamma does not like my walking any distance alone, but I suppose she would not object to my going to the Rectory with you?" asked Clare, more as of an old friend than a new acquaintance; and as Mr. Welby's answer was as much in accordance with her wishes as his own, she consented to accompany him.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was a very pleasant visit, and one that was long remembered by two who met there that day. The time had passed very pleasantly during the early part of the day, and Clare had had her luncheon, and began to feel quite at home with Mr. Welby's wife as well as himself. There was a homely kindness about them both that indicated a genuine sentiment of love to one's neighbour, and soon made itself felt by all who came within the sphere of the Rectory influence; so no wonder Clare Lyndon often thought to herself, "How pleasant it will be to have such neighbours so near—and how often I shall like to come and see them—if—if—mamma will like them also, and make no objection."

There was the great "if" in poor Clare Lyndon's case! It must be allowed that, after the two young Tempests came, it was still pleasanter; the time flew very quickly. Winnie was always happy and at home at the Rectory, and Fitz was a favourite there, and ever welcome when he came. The two girls' intimacy progressed rapidly. Clare, although a highly educated and very accomplished girl, besides having enjoyed extensive advantages in seeing all things worth seeing at home and abroad, was still, with it all, a girl of very simple natural tastes. She had been very little into society, owing to her father's illness and death about the time she was old enough to go out. Her mother never allowed her to visit anywhere, unless under her own superintendence, except—with *one* exception. This single exception was in favour of an old Mrs. Montague, an aunt of Clare's father, a lady of rather eccentric opinions, and the possessor of a very large fortune entirely at her own disposal. It was fully expected, by all who knew

the family, that either Sir Vere Lyndon or his sister would inherit their great-aunt's property.

Of late years Sir Vere had, for the most part, declined going to stay at his aunt's; whether it was from natural dislike to her peculiar manners, or for fear of being supposed to be fortune-hunting, no one but himself could tell. Mrs. Montague was shrewd and clever, with all her oddities, and warmly attached both to Sir Montague, her nephew, and apparently to his children.

Clare had been in the habit of going to stay at Deepwell Park as long as she could remember. When she was quite a little child, her father and mother and brothers (for there were two boys then) were generally of the party, but of late years a sort of coolness had sprung up between Mrs. Montague and Lady Lyndon; and since Sir Montague's death, the old lady had written her mind so strongly on the subject, of the way in which her nephew had left his property, that Lady Lyndon had taken of-

fence, and had not been since to Deepwell Park. Sir Vere was also in less favour there since his brother's death than he had been before ; and guiltless enough as the poor boy was of the unhappy catastrophe which caused it, still it seemed that Mrs. Montague could never feel the same for her younger nephew as before. It might have been that, during the elder boy's life, she had looked on Vere as the most natural heir to her own property ; and after his brother's death, supposing he would inherit Lyndon, had altered her intentions towards him.

On whatever side the coolness lay, or from whatever cause it sprang, it is certain that no one of the Lyndon family, except Clare, kept up any cordiality of intercourse with old Mrs. Montague. Lady Lyndon never tried to interrupt Clare's visits to Deepwell after her father's death, but gave a cold assent to her daughter's visits to her great-aunt, whenever the invitations came. She knew her husband's wishes too well, in that respect, to dream of

disputing them, though he was no longer there to enforce the same.

It was from Mrs. Montague's that Clare had been hastily sent home a few days previous. Some sort of fever had broken out in the house, and the old lady was in an agony till Sir Vere appeared to take away his sister, in answer to her urgent summons. He had himself been staying with an old friend, the tutor with whom he had travelled, and who had lately been presented by a former pupil to a good living, and had married on the strength of it.

It was from Mrs. Russell's that Sir Vere came to chaperon his sister home. It appeared their mother had not intended that either of her children should have joined her so soon. She, however, welcomed them with her usual equanimity when they made their unexpected appearance. Her son seemed at first uncertain whether he should remain where he was, or return whence he came; but his mother, according to custom, took the initiative upon herself, and told him he had better remain, as he

had come home—it would be as well for him to acquaint himself with the place and neighbourhood at that time as any other. So not knowing exactly what fate might have in store for him, and being besides in an unpleasantly dependent condition, which did not allow him much power of choice, Sir Vere briefly assented to his mother's proposition, being also almost tearfully urged to do so by his sister. And thus it came to pass that the Lyndon family were all assembled at that time at the Court.

The hours at the Rectory on that memorable day flew rapidly away. Fitz, having overcome his first feeling of embarrassment with Clare, soon became gay and entertaining, chatting away in his careless, light-hearted manner ; and Winnie was fully absorbed in her admiration of her new acquaintance, who seemed to her quite beyond the pale of common human beings, and made to be worshipped and looked up to accordingly.

Clare, on her part, was charmed with her new friends, and never having been allowed to asso-

ciate with any of her own age and standing, was doubly pleased with those that a lucky chance had thrown in her way that morning. Clare only wondered at intervals whether her mother would like Winnie, and sanction the intimacy she desired to form with her ; at the same time shyly hoping her brother would find some way of pleasing and amusing their new sailor friend, and showing him their sense of obligation in other ways besides that of common words.

Winnie was an enthusiast in regard to flowers —flowers of all sorts, wild and cultivated, were her passion. Clare had much the same taste in that respect, though hers was far more for rare and cultivated plants. Winnie's experience in such was necessarily very limited, and entirely confined to a yearly walk through Mr. Denbigh's conservatories, which did not boast of anything very wonderful, and an occasional peep at the contents of the Dowager Lady Fullerton's greenhouse. So Winnie fell back upon her practical acquaintance with some of the rare and beautiful wild-flowers which grew

in the low meadows round Hilborough, telling Clare she and Fitz had been looking for the flowering rush the day before, when they had met with their common adventure.

A little more talk on the subject made Clare express a wish to see this plant, and Winnie eagerly proposed that they should all set out that very moment and go and find a specimen. Clare was nothing loath; but when she was told how far it was to walk—going round some way to avoid all chance of encountering their friend the bull—she drew back a little, hesitating, fearing her mother would not like her to take such a walk. Winnie, however, pressed the matter, perhaps with more zeal than discretion, saying she was sure Mrs. Welby would let Miss Lyndon have old Prince to ride—she could sit quietly on him, with a shawl wrapped round, as Mrs. Welby often did when she went to distant cottages. Oh! it would be so nice—it was such a lovely afternoon, and she or Fitz could lead the pony, if Miss Lyndon would but just try.

Mrs. Welby, seeing Clare seemed inclined to do as Winnie petitioned, gave the old pony such a good character that Clare, girl-like, consented, seemingly well pleased. So it was settled then and there; and Mrs. Welby's sidesaddle being properly adjusted, and her own long riding-skirt drawn over Clare's white dress, the whole matter was satisfactorily arranged; and she being properly installed in her seat, and the reins placed in her delicately-gloved little hands, the party proceeded on their floral expedition.

There was only one change made in Winnie's programme, and that was, Mr. Welby undertook to lead the pony himself, instead of Fitz; so he stationed himself on one side of the fair rider, whilst Winnie posted herself on the other, and Mrs. Welby, taking her husband's disengaged arm, walked on a little in front. So the little cortége moved merrily on, with Clare seated in the midst, and her attendants all round. There were frequent stoppages on the road. Mr. Welby was constantly bringing the pony to a

stand, to show some object or other of possible interest to its rider. Various places had to be pointed out in the distance, and little histories sketched of the inhabitants—all of which Clare roused herself to listen to, with what attention she could command. Winnie was constantly darting off in search of flowers, which were found in great abundance, for Clare's inspection.

Fitz, on his part, never stirred from his post on Miss Lyndon's right hand, and most of the conversation that passed was carried on between them. Clare seemed well pleased to listen to his stories of far-off lands, and the beautiful tropical flowers and birds he had seen in such wonderful profusion there; and when Fitz would have paused, Clare would ask innumerable little questions that set the full tide of Fitz's foreign recollections all afloat again. Never had he been so happy in his life! A new strange bewildering joy took possession of all his faculties, and he felt that to have gone on thus through life, ever walking and talking by the old pony's

side, with that fair form beside him, would have been unutterable bliss.

Winnie's contentment in the very secondary position she occupied that day, and her perfect enjoyment in her new friend's society, went far to prove that love was as yet a very shadowy object in her young life; and however well-pleased she might have been with Barry Denbigh's little attentions when present, the absence of him and them by no means affected her enjoyment. So she flitted about, laughing and talking, looking as bright and pretty as the wild flowers she gathered, and brought in handfulls for Clare's inspection.

Mr. Welby led the way all through the meadow fields, and then up the lane which skirted the village, past many a cottage door, and finally wound round back to the parsonage, by the church and pretty school-house, which was conveniently near. Mr. Welby stopped the pony as they were passing by the latter, and turning round, said to Clare,

“This school was built by your grandfather

during the time I was at the Court. The late Lady Lyndon took a great interest in it, and all the children ; and I hope I may bespeak yours also ?”

For all answer, Clare Lyndon only looked down upon the flowers on her lap ; and then, feeling something more was required, answered rather shortly,

“ I daresay mamma will come here. She generally looks after the schools in the places where we are staying.”

“ And you, my dear young lady ?” persisted the clergyman, with a kindly smile, adding, “ I hope the children here will be gladdened sometimes with a sight of you amongst them ?”

But Clare answered, in a constrained tone, “ Oh ! very likely I may come now and then, but I have never done much in that way. Mamma has had rather an objection to my going about amongst the poor people—but she does a great deal herself.”

“ Perhaps,” said Winnie, coming to the rescue, “ you do not fancy teaching the children any

more than I do? I like playing with them, dear little things, and enjoy a school-feast as much as any of them—don't I, dear Mrs. Welby?"

"Yes," returned that good lady, with a kind smile, "you certainly like play better than work; and perhaps it is natural you young people should do so," looking at Miss Lyndon as she spoke.

"No," said Clare in reply; "I should not like such play at all. I am afraid you would find me more awkward at that than at teaching; but I see by the church clock it is five o'clock, and I really must be going home. Mamma will be quite frightened if she returns and does not find me at home, and no one knows where I am gone. I am sure, though, I have to thank you all for a very pleasant day," she concluded, courteously, looking round on all her companions.

"Oh! must you go already?" exclaimed Winnie, impulsively.

"Yes, and you must go, and I also," said

Fitz, awaking from his dream of felicity, and feeling, if it was time for Miss Lyndon to return home, it ought to be also for his sister and himself.

Then Mr. Welby, seeing his young guest was really anxious to take her departure without delay, immediately offered to turn the pony's head towards the park gate, instead of going up to the Rectory, saying he would lead it on to the Court, and he should have the pleasure of delivering her up in safety into her mother's hands.

Clare seemed well pleased with the proposition, and desirous to act upon it at once. So she held out her hand in succession to her new friends, with a kind good-bye and thanks to all, and then she and Mr. Welby went their way together. Fitz stood still for a minute, gazing after them, whilst Winnie prattled away for Mrs. Welby's especial benefit; then he suddenly started, and turning towards them exclaimed, "Come, Winnie, do not keep Mrs. Welby standing there all the evening."

"Oh! I am very glad to be kept as long as Winnie likes," said Mrs. Welby, good-naturedly adding—"I won't ask you to come in to tea, as I know your aunts dine soon after five; but we are always so glad to see you both, and I have enjoyed my afternoon ramble so much with all you young people."

"Oh! indeed it has been delightful!" said Fitz, enthusiastically; and then, as he shook hands, he added—"I have to thank you, Mrs. Welby, for the happiest day and walk I have ever had in my life."

"I hope you will have many more such," she replied carelessly; then, looking in the young man's face, she seemed suddenly to perceive something there which made her sigh and shake her head as she walked slowly home by herself.

CHAPTER XII.

ON his return home that same evening, Mr. Welby did not appear inclined to talk, having business on hand, so his wife forbore asking any questions. But the next morning, whilst they were both loitering a little in the garden before the Rector set off on his parish rounds, his wife began—

“ You were so late yesterday evening, James, in coming home, and then so busy afterwards, that I did not like to trouble you ; but I want very much to know whether you found Lady Lyndon returned, and if she was in a fright at her daughter’s absence ?”

“ Happily, we got there just as the carriage was driving away from the door, so the lady

had not much time for alarm ; but she did look rather surprised as I led old Prince up to the door, and helped her daughter to dismount from his back."

"She must have been glad to see you with Miss Lyndon."

"I don't think she was particularly glad ; she only said she should have liked to have known that her daughter was going to spend the day out, and where."

"How could she, as no one knew till the time came. But surely Lady Lyndon did not object to it?"

"Well, not exactly—that is, not in words ; but she said something about Miss Lyndon's never going out anywhere without her leave, or, at least, without her knowledge."

"And what did Miss Lyndon herself say?"

"Oh ! nothing—poor girl ! she ran into the house, after saying good-bye to me, and how much she was obliged to me for my trouble in bringing her home, and giving her such a pleasant day, instead of being all alone ; and then

Lady Lyndon asked me to walk into the garden, and as she told a groom to lead Prince home, I could not refuse."

Mrs. Welby was silent for a minute, whilst she stooped down and pulled up a straggling weed; and then she said,

"Lady Lyndon seems to keep her children—at least, her daughter—in strange subjection. At her age it cannot be very pleasant."

"I daresay they are accustomed to her ways, and no doubt Lady Lyndon must feel all the responsibility which attaches to her, now their poor father is dead, and everything is left in her hands to do the best she can for them."

"She told you so, James?—in that little walk she asked you to take with her in the garden—to excuse, I suppose, her strictness in regard to Miss Lyndon's movements."

"Something to that effect," returned the clergyman, with a smile. "She said she should have liked to have known something more of the neighbourhood and people in it before her son and daughter joined her at the Court."

"How ridiculous! As if she must influence their opinions in every way! I fear it must have been *me* she objected to, in Miss Lyndon's coming here! As she, in common with every member of the Lyndon family, must be pretty well acquainted with *you*."

"Don't alarm yourself, Patience, dear," said her husband, looking kindly into the face generally so quiet and composed, now a little disturbed at the apprehensions her husband's words had conjured up, but gradually calming down as he continued—

"I am very sure Lady Lyndon did not mean to be anything but civil and courteous, both to you and me; indeed she said she hoped to see much of us, and should be very glad for her daughter to spend an occasional day with us—when we were *quite alone*."

"Then she will not like her having met the Tempests here; but really, James, we could not shut our doors to our friends because Lady Lyndon desired it."

"I should think not, dear, I hope she will

become more reasonable in time, and see that, Lyndons though they are, there are many as good and estimable people in this world as themselves. Still, I do not think that Lady Lyndon means to set herself up as better than other people. She puzzles me a little, I confess, but the opinion I should draw from the little she said to me is, just that she is a woman who likes power—especially in her own family—and wishes everything, however trifling, to emanate from herself; and secondly, that the great object in her life is to settle her children advantageously—that is, that they should marry highly."

"Then she would not have approved of poor Fitz Tempest's look of passionate admiration in the direction of her daughter, after you led her away on the pony."

"No, indeed! Was it so? Well, no doubt the fancy will die out as suddenly as it sprang up, for there will not be much nourishment for it. Poor Fitz! he is a good, honest fellow, but he must not think of Clare Lyndon."

“I suppose you saw Sir Vere, James?”

“Yes. I had the pleasure of an introduction.”

“And how do you like him?”

“Not so well as his sister, perhaps because he is not nearly so much of a Lyndon as she is. She is like all the family I have ever seen, tall and fair—a good specimen of Saxon beauty.”

“Perhaps he is like his mother’s family—by the way, who was Lady Lyndon?”

“A Miss Smythe, or may be Smith, and that is all that is known. My dear pupil wrote and told me of his marriage, which was seemingly a very happy one, but he never said a word about the lady’s family or friends.”

“Possibly she had none.”

“Very likely; she was an orphan at a school in Brussels.”

“Then surely she ought not to be so extraordinarily particular about other people, and as if no one was fit to associate with her daughter.”

“I think, Patience, it is generally the par-

venues who take that line, when they have once achieved a better position for themselves ; but I really know nothing about Lady Lyndon's antecedents, and she may have very distinguished relations somewhere or other."

Mrs. Welby laughed.

"I am sure, James, no one cares so little about *that* as you would do ; we only want her to be nice and friendly and kind herself, and let her daughter be so too, as I am much inclined to think she would be, left alone. And tell me about the son—has he nice manners ?"

"Not very, I think, he is rather abrupt and reserved, but his position here is not a pleasant one. We all see him, as it were, in his father's place, and yet he is a mere shadow, all the substance is in the hands of the Lady of Lyndon. Now really, Patience, I cannot gossip any more this morning ; I had not intended doing so at all."

"Ah ! I see ; that is why you were so extra busy yesterday evening. You had nothing pleasant to say of the Lyndons, so you would rather

not talk about them at all. Well, dear husband, let us hope they will improve upon further acquaintance—if the lady will allow of it.”

“Yes, yes—no doubt we shall all shake together in time.”

And then the Rector and his wife went their ways to their separate avocations.

About the same hour, the same day, a conversation was passing between their near neighbours at the Court, which was somewhat characteristic of the speakers. Lady Lyndon and her daughter were sitting in the room they usually inhabited; the time was soon after breakfast that morning. It was still early, for Lady Lyndon was a person of active habits, and generally a much earlier riser than either her son or daughter. This room was the one she had received her visitors in on her first arrival at the Court—a sort of library, but not *the* library, which was a large, solemn-looking room at the opposite end of the house, and was entirely devoted to books, which, in their heavy dark oak cases, lined the walls on three

sides of the apartment. This library, although a spacious room, was smaller and much lighter than the other, and was devoted to other purposes besides containing books. There was a fine organ at one end of the room; there were a few fine pictures on the panels—a good one of Sir Montague as a boy over the fireplace; and a great store of portfolios, with rare and valuable prints and drawings.

This had been Sir Montague's own private apartment during the bachelor days he spent at the Court previous to his marriage, or acquaintance with the present Lady of Lyndon. It was no doubt one reason why she chose to make it her chief sitting-room, and gave it a preference to either of the spacious drawing-rooms, or another pretty but smaller apartment known as the ladies' morning room. It was certainly not on account of the fine organ Lady Lyndon chose it, for she was not musical herself, and cared little for it in others. Sir Montague and all his family were devoted to music, and his daughter resembled him in that as in many

other things. The eldest son, whom they had lost—his father's darling—had the same taste; but Sir Vere cared as little for sweet sounds as did his mother.

It was in this room that Clare and Lady Lyndon were seated that morning, both engaged in their own pursuits. Lady Lyndon was busy at her own peculiar writing-table, which was covered with letters and papers, and contained besides several drawers, which were also well furnished with useful documents. It did not seem an inviting sort of table to spend so many hours as that fair lady was wont to do there each day. But she looked very feminine and lovely in her matronly beauty, as she sat bending over a book with long rows and columns of figures on every page. Still the lady turned over the pages, and made her little memorandums with a quickness and facility which showed it was no new occupation in which she was so busily engaged. She presented as calm and inviting a picture as any on which the eye could wish to rest. She was

still a really beautiful woman—ever plainly dressed as to make and fashion, though the material was rich in the sombre hues of black or grey. Her hair, of a dark chestnut colour, was always covered by a small lace cap, though very fine and abundant.

Lady Lyndon could even then bear to stand a comparison with her lovely daughter, who, taller, slighter, and even fairer, and with a different tone of colouring and style of beauty, sat at some distance from her mother, engaged in her morning's occupation. It seemed a very satisfactory one, judging from the young girl's air of absorbed interest. She was engaged in making a very pretty drawing from a heap of wild-flowers which lay scattered before her on the table, and from which she selected different specimens from time to time, placing them in order according to her design.

Neither of the ladies had spoken for some time—at last Lady Lyndon looked up from her rows of figures, and, after gazing for a few minutes on her daughter's occupation, asked,

“Where did that heap of litter come from, Clare?”

“Only some wild-flowers, mamma, that I brought home yesterday evening.”

“I fear you are wasting your time and your talents upon them; you know I am not very fond of your painting flowers at all. I wish you would practise a little more of your figure drawing instead.”

“I don’t succeed with figures, mamma. I have no talent that way, and these wild-flowers are so graceful and pretty; you must let me make a drawing from them.”

Lady Lyndon slightly elevated her delicate eyebrows, and gently shrugged her drooping shoulders as she remarked,

“Well, this morning you can go on with them, if you are so very much charmed with your work; but you know I am not fond of your wandering about in the fields, picking flowers. I think you had a lesson in that respect the other day, though that was your brother’s fault.”

"I think it was the farmer's, mamma, who let his dreadful bull roam about in the public pathway. Vere told him he had no business to do so."

"Then Vere was very injudicious in doing so!—and I daresay offended one of our best tenants. He might have spoken to me first, and then I should have considered what was the best course to pursue in the matter."

"I think there was only one, mamma," replied Clare, half laughing, "and that was to shut up Monsieur Bull in close confinement, from which I hope they will be careful he does not escape."

Lady Lyndon did not join in her daughter's laugh; she only replied, with perfect imperturbability,

"At all events, I shall feel it my duty to call and make inquiries. I had intended it yesterday, but was obliged to go, as you know, elsewhere. Pray, where did you go to find these flowers?"

"Into the low meadows, near Mr. Welby's

house, mamma ; and Miss Tempest found and picked them all for me. You know I was on the pony."

"Miss Tempest is used to that sort of thing, and roaming about by herself; but you have been more carefully and differently brought up, Clare."

"She seems a very nice girl, mamma. I should like to ask her here some day, if you have no objection."

"You know, Clare, I have never encouraged your forming intimacies with young people of whom you can know nothing. I have endeavoured to guard you, especially in that respect."

"Yes, I know, mamma ; and whilst I was a child that was all very well, but you may trust me, now, not to like people who are not fit to be my companions ; surely that Miss Tempest is a very nice girl, or Mr. and Mrs. Welby would not be so fond of her."

"I don't know that," returned Lady Lyndon cautiously. "I do not know the Tempest

family myself, but I have heard your dear father speak of Captain Tempest in a manner that would not make me very desirous to be on terms of intimacy with his family."

Clare flushed up, as she said hastily,

"Surely, mamma, that would not be very fair to condemn all the family because Miss Tempest's grandfather was a disagreeable, despotic old man!"

Lady Lyndon flushed in her turn as she answered, rather more warmly than she usually did,

"He was more than that!—he was an unjust, illiberal old man; and from what I know of his character, I should be very careful in allowing you to form any intimacies with his descendants. Besides—" said she in a cooler tone—"I do not much fancy that Miss Winifred Tempest; she seems silly and noisy. I do not know what her brother may be like, but I will tell Vere to pay him some little attention—give him a day's shooting, perhaps—and if there is nothing objectionable about him (like his grand-

father) he can ask him over to dine here ; and then I think we will have paid him in full for getting rid of the animal that seems to have alarmed you so much. As the young man (like the rest of his family) is a sailor, of course he will not be here long—so a little civility will not signify, and I suppose it will be expected of us."

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was a long pause after Lady Lyndon had spoken. Clare, feeling how useless it was to protest, held her tongue, and bent over her drawing, with the flush deepening on her fair cheek. Now and then she raised her head, and gazed dreamily out of the window on the beautiful scene which lay in the stillness of an autumn morning all round the house. She felt, as she did so, something like some rare lonely foreign bird which, enclosed within its splendid gilded prison, looks without with envious longing on the free, unfettered, though commoner specimens of its species which have the happy privilege of flitting to and fro in the pure air and glorious sunshine, and seeking and associating with others of their own kind.

Lady Lyndon, meanwhile, having cast up her columns of figures, returned the book to one of the drawers in her writing-table, and then turned her attention to a large map of the Lyndon estates and property, which she unfolded, and laying it before her, proceeded carefully to study, now and then making a pencil mark, and jotting down some little memorandum in connexion with the same.

Whilst so occupied, the door was hastily opened, and Sir Vere made his appearance for the first time that morning. He was dressed for shooting, and seemed in a hurry, as he said, without advancing into the room,

“I thought I should find you here, mother. Good morning, Clare. I am rather late.”

“That is no uncommon occurrence,” interrupted Lady Lyndon, rather drily; then added immediately after, “But as you are here at last, I should be glad if you could give me your attention for a few minutes.”

“I am sorry that is impossible just at this present time, mother, as I am going to Mr. Den-

bigh's to shoot this morning, and I am rather behind time."

"I was not aware you had any engagement at Nether Hall. You never mentioned it to me when we were driving to the Grove yesterday ; and I told you, if you remember, that I should probably want you to go with me round some parts of the estate this morning."

"I did not mention it, mother, because it was only when we were there that Bertram Denbigh asked me if I would join their party this morning, which I promised to do, and dine there afterwards."

"Then you had forgotten all about your previous engagement to drive with me this morning ?" said Lady Lyndon, coldly.

"My dear mother, what can it signify whether we drive (I am sure I don't know *where!*) to-day or to-morrow ?"

"It may not signify to you, Vere, but to me it signifies a good deal. I have a great deal on my hands, and heavy responsibilities, which your dear father pleased to confide to me, and I

am determined to see to them all in the best way that is possible."

"I daresay you will, mother; but I do not see that these responsibilities extend to me."

"Yes, they do—if I choose to make you a participant in them."

Sir Vere made no response to this, only a sort of cynical smile flitted over his features, and after a moment's pause, he said,

"Well, I shall be at your service to-morrow, mother. Till then I will say good-bye."

He was turning to leave the room, when his mother called to him,

"Stop a moment, Vere, if you are not in too great a hurry to go your own way—which is the only one I have ever known you take since your childhood! I was just going to ask you to leave this little parcel and note for Mr. Welby, at the Rectory. You must pass the door, so it will not delay you much."

"Very well," said Sir Vere, looking up at an antique clock which slowly chimed the hours

and quarters, and in doing so at that moment made him observe,

“I find I am too late to go to the house, so I must join them at the place Bertram told me of. I will leave your parcel, if it is ready. My trap has been waiting some time at the door.”

Lady Lyndon did not hasten her movements in consequence of her son’s impatience. She folded some papers up and placed them in a large envelope, and then read her own note, which was to accompany them, carefully over; in fact delaying Sir Vere’s departure nearly ten minutes.

He strolled over to where Clare sat, and the brother and sister talked together in an undertone whilst Lady Lyndon prepared her despatch. Sir Vere, who was an artist himself, seemed to admire the progress of his sister’s work, and Clare eagerly asked his advice on some little details respecting it. Then Sir Vere took up a pencil to illustrate his meaning, whilst his sister watched its movements with absorbed interest, and the two became so engrossed with their occupation, that Lady Lyndon had finished her

deliberate proceeding, and sat with the note and parcel before her, looking in vain for her son to turn his attention in her direction. At last she spoke.

“ Well, really! After being in such a hurry five minutes ago when I wanted you, Vere! You seem very quickly to have forgotten all about it.”

“ I think I have, mother; but I am ready now to fulfil your commands.”

“ Oh, no! I should never dream of exercising authority even with my own children, and with, perhaps, the means to enforce it, in my hands; but if my wishes are disregarded, it is not likely that my commands would meet with a more willing obedience.”

“ At all events, I am waiting here, mother, to do your bidding, whatever it may be,” said the lady’s son, with a certain compression of his lips that showed he exercised some forbearance in saying no more.

“ Here is my note and parcel, then, if you don’t forget to leave them at the Rectory, Vere.”

"No, I will be sure to leave them as I go past." And taking them up, Sir Vere left his mother's presence with a sensation of relief, though certain murmuring thoughts arose in the young man's heart, which would not be entirely beat down, and said, "All this, because I make an engagement of my own, instead of being dragged about at my mother's chariot-wheels, whenever it pleases her to survey her own property!" With reflections like these, it is not surprising that Sir Vere was a little out of sorts as he drove up to the Rectory. He meant to execute his commission in leaving his parcel, and then driving on with what speed he could to the nearest spot where Mr. Denbigh's party was likely to be found. Unfortunately the Rector was just coming out of his house, and hastened with alacrity to greet his guest, whom he recognised, as the dog-cart stopped at the door, and met him, saying,

"Pray come in. Pray get out for a moment. I am so glad to see you here, Sir Vere."

Sir Vere, however, simply declined the good

Rector's hospitality, and said he was in haste, and had only stopped at his mother's request to deliver her parcel. Still Mr. Welby would not see anything but kindly attention in the young man's calling himself, and proceeded to observe as he opened the envelope,—

“Ah, this is very kind of Lady Lyndon. She sends me various plans and projects for bettering the condition of the poor people, and desires me to send the names and conditions of all I know here; her intentions are most munificent and charitable.”

“Yes. My mother has charity enough, I believe, to pauperise a whole parish. She will have no lack of applicants.”

Mr. Welby looked up with a perplexed air into the young man's face, and then, observing its stern expression, said,

“I am afraid these measures do not meet with your approval?”

“I have not seen the papers you hold in your hand, or even heard what my mother proposes to do. I only spoke as to her general

propensity to give to the poor people around."

"A very amiable propensity, and one I trust you will be disposed to follow, as you may see need and necessity for the same."

"No," returned the young man, who had got out of the cart, and was standing beside the Rector—"no; do not, pray, calculate on my giving propensities." Then, plunging his hands into the pockets of his shooting-jacket, he continued, with a laugh half scornful, half sad—"In the first place, I am not fond of giving or receiving; and in the second place, I have next to nothing to give."

"Oh! yes, you have, dear sir; you can give us what we shall value as much as your silver and gold—sympathy and encouragement."

"Ah! that is easier said than bestowed; for, in truth, I have no sympathy with the charity that goes about alms-giving."

"Then what would you have done?" asked the Rector.

"It little matters what I would do, or leave undone, seeing I have no power to enforce

either ; and whatever my ideas may be on the vexed subject of relieving the poor, they have all the crudeness of inexperience ; but if you wish to know in what direction my opinions tend, I can only say in one word, to ‘independence.’”

“Yes, that is very well ; and of course, if everyone, to the very lowest, was happily independent, there would be no occasion for us to plan or work for their benefit.”

“Certainly not, as far as ways and means go. I would give every man—ay, and woman too—the opportunity of earning a just reward for their labour—a fair day’s wages for all who chose to work for them.”

“Yes ; but you are aware there are so many exceptional cases in which no work can be done, as well as insufficiency of employment for those even who have every inclination to work ; and then take the cases of the sick and aged, who have nothing to fall back upon when their working days are over, but the kindness and charity of their richer neighbours.”

“Ah ! it is of that I complain,” said the

young man, his dark eyes kindling, and the cynical expression fading away into one of earnest interest in his subject as he continued—“There it is that you debase and degrade the character of all our poor people. How *can* you expect them to retain their upright feelings of honest independence when they all know the end of their life of toil?”

“It is very sad, but I do not see how the case is to be met, except through the intervention of public and private charity.”

“I fear my plans are Utopian,” said Sir Vere; “but I do think, if I were a man of property and influence, I would try something more effectual—less degrading to the character of those to whom the lords of the soil owe so much.”

“Well, tell me your plans; though, be it remembered, we are given to understand that the poor will never cease from out of the land.”

“There will be poor enough even if all my dreams could be realized—do not fear that. My

plan would be that it should be compulsory on every parish and town to furnish some sort of employment for all those that are willing to work. I would pull down all those gigantic prison-houses called unions, that are the veritable dread of all the honest poor, and I would erect in every parish a small infirmary for the sick, and those who are past their work, where they would be free to come and go as suited them ; and I would establish government clubs, to which the contribution of very small sums would give every payer a right to a decent support after a certain age.”

“ Well, suppose you could—which I fear you could not, or it would have been done before—thus supply the wants, and maintain the honest independence of all the better sort of poor, what would you do with the larger class of reckless, improvident, as well as lazy, ill-conditioned poor, with whom our unions are so abundantly supplied ? You would take away their refuge, and leave them nothing in its place.”

“Pardon me, they would be driven to work, if able—if not, to the infirmary until they were; but I should not be very indulgent in the case of idle or refractory subjects. If any man will not work, neither let him eat—eh, Mr. Welby?”

“I should have no objection to trying your plan, were it possible; so possibly I may have the satisfaction of seeing part of it work in this parish, if you and Lady Lyndon are agreed as to the expediency of providing all the poor with work, and the sick with an infirmary, and the aged with a safe benefit club for their maintenance.”

“No, I am not in the least sanguine as to my mother’s co-operation in my scheme; she declares the poor are too independent already, and if they could claim labour as a right, and provide for their own future maintenance, they would never be content to remain in their proper places. She declares, too, that alms-giving and beggar-relieving is one of the cardinal vir-

tues, and therefore we are bound to keep up a proper supply, for the purpose of exercising our charitable inclinations upon them ; and that being the case, I think you and Mrs. Welby may look upon the Court, now my mother is presiding there, as an inexhaustible fountain of soup and other refreshments, with flannel petticoats and other garments, as well as half-crowns and shillings at discretion, or rather indiscretion,”—and then Sir Vere laughed, and the Rector began to doubt whether he had been in earnest at all, or only turning the whole subject into ridicule.

“ Well,” said Sir Vere, after a moment, “ now it is high time for me to be off ; having wasted my time and yours so shamefully, I must beg you to forgive me. I am about to join Mr. Denbigh’s shooting party, and am not very sure I know which way to turn to find them, I feel such a stranger in my father’s country.”

“ You will soon cease to be and to feel one, I trust,” said the Rector, kindly ; and then the old

and the young man shook hands, and parted with a friendly feeling on both sides, notwithstanding some trifling difference of opinions.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BOUT this time Winnie went to spend a day with her friends at the Grove. A small event to chronicle, but it seemed a great one to the girl who had so few to diversify her life. Perhaps she would have estimated the invitation still more highly, had she known that the great Lady of Lyndon had virtually struck out her name from the list of eligible visitors to her daughter.

Winnie was in truth longing and hoping to be asked to the Court, that she might again enjoy the pleasure of seeing and being with Clare Lyndon. She even debated within herself whether she might not walk up to the Court

some fine morning, uninvited, and claim a renewal of the acquaintance she had accidentally made at the Rectory. But Fitz, to whose opinion she always deferred, advised Winnie to wait awhile; he did not wish, he said, to force his acquaintance upon Sir Vere or his sister, because of the trifling service he had rendered them. Perhaps they would be meeting again somewhere or other in the neighbourhood. That was all very well for Fitz, no doubt, as he went out a good deal, and had therefore a very fair prospect of falling in with the Lyndons accidentally; but to poor Winnie, who went out so little, her chances were very remote; and, as Winnie observed,

“ Unless I go to see Miss Lyndon, I am afraid she will quite forget all about us.”

Fitz was not to be moved, even by the force of that argument; he only observed, as Winnie had already been with her aunt to the Court, and some of the family had returned their visit, he did not see any occasion for her to go there any more at present.

It was not often that Fitz was so punctilious and ceremonious, but he seemed suddenly to have become so ; and yet, thought Winnie, she had never seen him better pleased, or happier, than in that walk they had taken with Miss Lyndon from the Rectory.

Well ! the fates brought about the much desired meeting with the charming Clare when least expected. Winnie walked up to the Grove, Fitz going as far as the gates, and promising to fetch her home in the afternoon, at which time she was to return ; and then he took himself to Nether Hall, to wile away the intervening hours with Barry Denbigh. Winnie found her friend alone, as she expected. The dowager would never have thought of asking a party to meet Winnie Tempest, and very happy were the two girls wandering about the grounds, and in and out of the house half a dozen times in the course of the day.

It so happened that the Lady of Lyndon, with her daughter, came to call the same afternoon. It was Clare's first visit, for Lady

Lyndon wished to make her own observations on the family party before she took her daughter. She had certain plans and projects already dimly shaping themselves in her active brain, which led to the conclusion that possibly Lady Fullerton's grand-daughter might be an advantageous companion for her daughter; but she wished first to know a little more of the young lady. In consequence of what she had seen of Edith Hampden the day she and Sir Vere lunched there, when the Denbighs were of the party, she arrived at the conclusion that the acquaintance between the two girls should be made at once, and accordingly drove over a few days after.

The Dowager and her daughter were in the drawing-room alone when Lady and Miss Lyndon were announced. Nothing could be more amiable and pleasing than Lady Lyndon's manner when she said,

“I have brought my daughter to introduce to you and Lady Jane, and I am most anxious that she should have the pleasure also of be-

coming acquainted with Miss Hampden. I only hope she has not left you yet?"

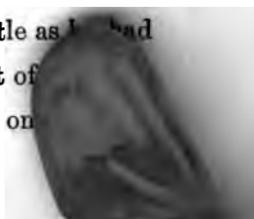
"Oh! no," said Lady Jane. "Edith is somewhere in the grounds with her friend, Winnie Tempest. I daresay you know her—a nice little girl. If Miss Lyndon will come with me, I daresay we shall find them somewhere not very far off."

There was no drawing back then, though Lady Lyndon would have been glad to have found some pretext for keeping her daughter with her, or else accompanying her to find the young people. However, she felt that would not do, for the Dowager had already begun some interminable history which claimed all her attention; and Clare had risen joyfully from her stiff position, pleased and eager to go with that "nice Lady Jane," and glad to hear that she should find Winnie Tempest as well as Edith Hampden, whom she much desired to see.

It was a pleasant meeting on all sides. Edith was so perfectly natural and sociable,

that she and Clare were soon on the best of terms ; whilst Winnie had the delight of finding that Miss Lyndon seemed as well pleased to renew her acquaintance with herself as to make that of Edith Hampden.

Before Lady Jane left the three girls, two more visitors appeared upon the scene—one was a very constant one, so no one thought of asking what brought him that afternoon ; and the other was Fitz Tempest, calling, according to promise, a little before the time he was to take his sister home. Having seen Lady Lyndon with the Dowager in the drawing-room, as he and Barry stopped for a few minutes there on their first arrival, he was not quite unprepared for the sight of Clare Lyndon in the croquet-ground, where he found the four ladies assembled. The glimpse of that beautiful face and graceful form, which Fitz recognised as they strolled leisurely up, was like a vision of paradise to the young man. Little as he had said even to Winnie on the subject of meeting and walk, it had been the on



of his heart ever since ; and now, as he was about to be once more in her presence, poor Fitz felt as if he had entered Heaven.

It appeared that Barry Denbigh and Clare Lyndon were already slightly acquainted, as he had been his father's companion on one or two occasions when they had met or visited the Lyndon family in Sir Montague's lifetime. Barry said, however, he had not seen Clare since she was almost a child, though he and Sir Vere had been together for a short time in the same place abroad, and were in consequence better acquainted, though by no means intimate.

Clare seemed very well inclined to recognise the son of her father's old friend, and had of course more to say to him than to her very recent acquaintance, Fitz Tempest. Poor Fitz was falling in love in a most headlong manner ; and although he must have been perfectly conscious of the fact, chose to ignore it to himself, and even speculated on the chances that his friend Barry might entertain some of the sentiments with which his own heart was at that moment

full to overflowing. He thought to himself, “Who can look at her and not feel what joy it would be to die for her? Was there ever any earthly created being like her?” And much more of the same kind passed in his mind whilst he helped to arrange the croquet hoops and balls, and then enjoy the happiness of playing on Clare’s side.

This partnership brought them on more intimate terms, and Clare was tasting some of the joys of unwonted freedom in the companionship of those about her, when a sudden interruption occurred in their game, from the coming amongst them of Lady Lyndon herself. She gave no outward token of disapprobation as she glanced round the group; and as Lady Jane had been enlisted by the players, and was still with the young people, she could not complain that a *chaperon* (if needful) was wanting.

“Pray do not let me stop you all,” said the lady, in her calm measured tones, as Clare dropped her mallet on seeing her mother’s approach, and Fitz forbore handing her the ball

which he had picked up for her. Edith and Winnie, however, continued laughing, and unmoved by her presence, although the former hastened to say, "How do you do, Lady Lyndon?" and then continued her game, till she suddenly saw that Clare had turned away, and then placed herself by her mother's side. Lady Jane too, knowing the Dowager would not approve of all the party running away and leaving her alone, began to say something about her being obliged to go in; and then Lady Lyndon said that Mr. Denbigh was in the drawing-room, and talking so busily to Lady Fullerton, that she had taken the opportunity of coming away to find her daughter and remind her that it was more than time they should be returning home. And so the happy little party broke up, Lady Lyndon, however, declaring, with much suavity, that if they wished to go on, and would finish their game in a short time, she would be happy to wait for her daughter; and then, turning quickly to her, she asked,

"And who are on your side, my dear?"

Clare, however, possibly did not hear, as she walked away to say good-bye to Edith; and then Lady Lyndon happened to observe Winnie, and said,

“I daresay you are on my daughter’s side.”

“No,” returned Winnie abruptly; “but my brother is, and Lady Jane, and I am playing with Edith and Mr. Denbigh against them.”

Lady Lyndon merely remarked,

“Oh, indeed! Well, if no one will play any more, I think, Clare, we had better go home.” Then she turned to shake hands graciously with Barry Denbigh, observing, “Your father tells me, Vere has been with you this morning.”

“Yes, he only went away when Tempest and I walked up here.”

“Perhaps you will come and see him soon? We shall have some good shooting for you, I hope; though I fear the old keeper is not quite up to the mark. I have thoughts of getting another.”

"Indeed," returned Barry; "I fear old Hutton won't like that."

"Oh, of course I should pension off the old man," returned the lady, and then added, "Those old servants seem to think they have more right to order in their department than their masters, but that does not suit me." This was said in a light gentle tone, but there was a ring of determination in it that shewed the Lady of Lyndon meant to hold her own. Then she turned to Edith, and hoped also that they should soon see her at the Court. No such invitation was extended to either of the Tempests; but they hardly observed the omission, as Fitz had picked up the mallet that Clare had so lately been playing with, and pleased himself by holding it in his hand; his whole attention being meanwhile engrossed in watching the effect of the rays of evening sunshine which played about and lit up the golden tresses of Clare's beautiful hair.

Winnie on her part was thinking what a pity it was to have had their nice game broken up

so soon, and how good-natured Barry Denbigh always was in helping her to win. However, as the game was ended, the whole party walked together up to the house, Clare keeping close to her mother's side, whilst Lady Jane walked with and talked to both. But the daughter's countenance was somewhat dejected and downcast, whilst that of her mother was calm and self-reliant as usual; and it cannot be denied, poor Clare had rather the look of being placed in safe custody, whilst Lady Lyndon seemed satisfied that it should be so.

As they approached the house, Mr. Denbigh's face appeared at the drawing-room window; and then, shortly after, raising the sash, he stepped out, and joined them whilst still at the bottom of the lawn.

" You have left my mother alone?" asked Lady Jane, as soon as Mr. Denbigh came within hearing. He replied to the anxious query with an amused smile, and then said,

" No, Lady Jane, have no fears. Lady Fullerton is well amused. I left her in the pleasant

society of the two Miss Tempests, who have walked up to claim their niece ;” then, turning to speak to Winnie, who was close behind with Edith and the young men, he said, “ Winnie, your aunts are in the drawing-room, and wished you to know ; they are come here to walk home with you.”

Winnie received the tidings in a different spirit to that of Clare Lyndon on the approach of her mother. She looked up at Mr. Denbigh with a dimpling smile, which showed all her small pearly teeth, and answered,

“ How kind of them ! I am so glad they have come. We shall all have such a nice walk home this lovely evening.”

“ I daresay they did not know Fitz was in waiting,” said Mr. Denbigh.

Whether they did or not, the Miss Tempests were not sorry of an excuse to pay the Dowager a visit, nor did she ever lament when they did so. There was always a great deal to hear and relate on both sides, and the three ladies were rather relieved when they saw Mr. Denbigh ap-

proach the window, and finally take himself off through the same.

“Men are always so in the way,” said the Dowager; adding, “They like to hear everything that is going on, without appearing curious, and they never tell you anything worth hearing themselves.”

“I am sure Fitz never does,” said Penelope, sighing.

“Ah! perhaps that is all natural,” said Lady Fullerton, who enjoyed a little contradiction. “And you cannot expect a young man like him to come and tell all he hears to us old folks.”

That was rather an unkind cut, as the Dowager might certainly, as regarded age, have been mother to her two friends. However, no doubt they were, like herself, “old folks,” in the young man’s estimation. As the two sisters continued silent under this little rebuff, the Dowager continued,

“But it is different with a man of Charles Denbigh’s age; he might have something to tell us sometimes worth hearing.”

"Oh! yes, certainly he might," said Penelope; and then Arethusa added,

"And I am sure he would come and tell it to you before anyone if he had."

"Well, I can't get him to tell me anything about this new woman at Lyndon. I want to know what he really thinks of her, and he always puts me off with something about Sir Montague's high opinion. My own idea is, she domineers over her daughter, and would do so over her son if she had the opportunity. I want to know what sort of allowance she makes him (what a shame it was to have cut him off so entirely from his place and property); but Mr. Denbigh declares he knows nothing about their private affairs, or what she would do in case of his making a good marriage; and all that is of the utmost importance for the world in general to know."

"Or rather those who are concerned in asking the question—I mean mothers with daughters," said Arethusa, sagaciously.

"Or grandmothers," amended the Dowager.

“Ah! but, dear Lady Fullerton, you are happily out of the question, as dear Edith is all but engaged.”

“You forget I have other granddaughters, Miss Tempest,” said the Dowager.

Then Penelope, by way of diversion, observed, “I hear, all round about the place, that Lady Lyndon is wonderfully charitable.”

“What, in the giving alms way, I suppose? Well, it is easy enough to gain golden opinions that way, when you have more money than you know what to do with; and she seems to have sounded her trumpet already.”

“The poor people are quite enthusiastic about the new lady,” said Arethusa.

“Well, there she comes, so we had better drop the subject,” said the Dowager; and soon after the party at the Grove took leave, and went their several ways.

CHAPTER XV.

A FEW days after this gathering at the Grove, Lady Jane received a letter from her sister-in-law, Lady Fullerton.

“A letter from Isabella, mother. I wonder what she is writing about?” was the remark it called forth, showing it was rather an uncommon event.

“Perhaps some of the children are ill, and she and her elder daughters are going out, so she wants Edith to go to the Castle and help nurse and amuse them; but I shan’t let her go.”

“No, mother, you are quite wrong,” replied Lady Jane, with an amused smile.

“Well, then, what *does* she want? I am

sure it is not worth guessing about any more.
Perhaps it is *you* she wants?"

"No—she only wants to come here herself,
and see you and me, just for a couple of nights,
on their way home from Somerleigh."

"What can have put that into her head? I
do not think she ever came here but once in
her life before, and that was when something
was going on in the neighbourhood that she
wished to attend."

"Well, Isabella does not say *what* brings her
this time, but she has the two eldest girls with
her, and in a postscript says Horace is also of
the party; and if we have not room for him, he
can go to an inn in Hilborough."

"A goodly party! Well, pray let them come,
if they are so affectionately disposed all of a
sudden," said the Dowager, amiably; and then
added—"Horace!—that is the third boy, is it
not? There are so many, I quite forget their
names and ages; but I think he is one of the
younger ones."

"Yes, he is the sailor, and is about fifteen. I

remember Edith said they were expecting him home."

"Well, it is only for two nights, happily," remarked the Dowager, hospitably. "And as they talk of coming, you say, to-morrow, there is no time to put them off, even if we were so disposed."

"Oh! we shall be very happy to see them, mother, and I am glad Isabella is coming in such a friendly, pleasant way."

"We cannot tell whether it is a pleasant way or not till we have seen her," returned her mother, discontentedly.

Good Lady Jane was doubly glad that the notice was so short, seeing it left so little time for her mother to worry and wonder in expectation of the unwonted visit; whilst her own share of preparation was soon accomplished in the readiest and kindliest manner.

Lady Jane had always been a favourite with her half-brother and his family, though, as the feeling did not extend to her mother, there had not been any very frequent intercourse between

the two families. The Dowager had declined all invitations to Hampden Castle, and had never visited it since her husband's death ; and she was always opposed to her daughter's going, as it interfered with her own comfort ; so it was on very rare occasions that Jane had been permitted to keep up any intercourse with the reigning family at the Castle. She was as much pleased as surprised at the opportunity thus unexpectedly offered ; and to Edith, who was fond of her cousins, the announcement of this visit gave unqualified satisfaction.

As the travelling party came by rail to Hilborough, and had specified what time they should arrive, there was no room for discussion or suspense. About a quarter of an hour after the train was known to be due at Hilborough, the expected guests made their appearance at the Grove. Nothing could be, apparently, more friendly than the greeting on both sides. The Dowager put on her best and most conciliating manners on the occasion, whilst the younger Lady Fullerton made herself quite as

pleasant as a self-invited guest might be expected to do. She was too thoroughly a woman of the world not to carry off, in the most perfect and natural way, any part it might suit her purpose to play. Whatever there might be *dessous les cartes* in this visit to her husband's step-mother, nothing appeared in the transaction but what might have been placed to an amiable desire to see such near connections when so good an opportunity offered.

It was the first time the two girls Audrey and Constance had been to the Grove, or even seen the Dowager ; but they were both pleasant, lively girls, perfectly self-possessed, and endowed with that comfortable amount of self-esteem that made them feel assured of a welcome wherever they might choose to present themselves ; so they were soon at home at the Grove, and making much of the Dowager, as if she had been an old and esteemed, though hitherto unknown relative.

Neither Lady Constance nor her sister Audrey was by any means a beauty, which had been a

subject of much mortification to their mother, who had been extremely pretty herself. Her younger daughters all promised to be handsomer than their two elder sisters, especially the one who was expecting to appear the next season.

In the meantime Lady Fullerton was extremely desirous that one at least should marry well before her third daughter came out. Lady Constance and her sister had enjoyed every advantage their mother's position in the fashionable world could give them, for the last three or four seasons, but without any satisfactory result.

Constance, though well up in the small talk of general society, was nevertheless a shallow-minded girl, without much worth seeking beneath the surface. Audrey was decidedly the superior nature of the two, and, though not pretty, had a piquancy of manner that was attractive, and made amends for the want of positive good looks. Still neither she nor her sister had ever received any proposal of marriage, al-

though they had, besides their London experiences, visited constantly in gay country houses, and spent a winter or two abroad since that time in Rome when Lady Lyndon remembered seeing the family there, and would no doubt have become acquainted with them but for her husband's state of health, as he had formerly been intimate with the Hampden family. As it was, the acquaintance was entirely confined to the son, who was then a very young man, but occasionally visited at Lord Fullerton's with his tutor, Mr. Russell.

It was to this fact that Lady Fullerton casually referred in her after-dinner chat with Lady Jane, whilst the Dowager nodded comfortably on the sofa at a short distance. Then, too, did Lady Fullerton ask many questions of her sister-in-law respecting the family so recently come to the Court; and then, also, did she declare her wish and intention of making the acquaintance of the whole Lyndon family the following day. She also confided to Lady Jane—what she had already heard from the boy himself—that the

main object Horace had in accompanying his mother and sisters to the Grove was to see Fitzgerald Tempest, having been told he happened to be at Hilborough just then.

“And indeed,” said Lady Fullerton, speaking with more feeling than Jane had given her credit for, though Lady Fullerton was not a bad mother, according to her light, and Horace, the sailor-boy, was her favourite son—“Indeed, I am desirous, on my own part, to see this Mr. Tempest; he was so very kind to poor Horace when he first went to sea, and I really believe he saved my poor darling’s life, for he fell overboard, and no one dared to go after him but this young lieutenant, who jumped over after him, and held Horace up till the boat was launched, and they were both taken up, more dead than alive.”

“Good Fitz!” said Lady Jane. “But we never heard a word of this; he never told it, even in his own family, or our little friend Winnie would have mentioned it.”

“I daresay not. Young men seldom think.

twice of such things. I shall like, however, to remind him of it; we heard of him through young Bingham; he is nephew of your neighbour and landlord, Mr. Denbigh. We met Admiral Bingham at my brother's at Somerleigh, and he said his son had just joined his ship, and had met Mr. Tempest at his uncle's. We talked a good deal about him, for the Admiral seemed to take a great interest in him, and knows him well by repute as his son's most intimate friend."

"He is a great favourite of ours," said Lady Jane; "and I am always glad to hear any good of him."

Then the conversation glided off from Fitz and his merits, back to Somerleigh, whence Lady Fullerton and her daughters and son had come. They spoke a little of its possessor, Lady Fullerton's only brother, Lord Tudor, a man of middle age, but who was still unmarried —of ancient family, with a magnificent place and fortune, and yet who had never been known to have entertained a preference for any woman

strong enough to induce him to seek her as his wife.

“It is very strange,” said his sister; “but although Tudor’s taste is the most perfect, and is universally allowed to be so, he never can see any woman or girl, however lovely, without discovering some flaw—either in her beauty or her mental capacity. He is so fastidious, that unless he could wed a statue or a picture, he will never, I am persuaded, find living perfection to suit him.”

“Cannot you persuade Lord Tudor to content himself without perfection with some nice girl who has just faults enough to save her from perfection?”

“No, I shall never persuade him, nor any one else, unless his time come for falling in love; and now he is getting rather *passé* himself, though his taste is still considered supreme in regard to beauty, and people are pleased to defer to his opinion, which can make or mar a *débutante* at once. It is the more provoking his not marrying, as, if he does not, our old title

and family place pass away to the nearest male heir—a man no one knows, and quite in a different position of life—it is sad to think of."

And then Lady Fullerton heaved a sigh, and looked at her two common-place daughters and her handsome sailor boy, who, with their Cousin Edith, were laughing and talking as merrily as youth and high spirits could make them.

Faithful to her intentions, the next day Lady Fullerton the younger, informed the Dowager of her wish to call on the Lyndons, as well as the Tempest family, asking her for the loan of her carriage for that purpose. The elder lady was very ready to place her carriage at her daughter-in-law's disposal, being well satisfied that she should find amusement for herself during the single day of her visit, and volunteering that Lady Jane should accompany her, if she did not intend taking both her daughters.

"Oh! no, I shall only take one—Audrey, I think—with me; and we shall both be very .

grateful to Jane if she will kindly *chaperon* and introduce us to your neighbours."

Thus it was arranged; and Constance was left with Edith to take care of grandmamma.

An inquiry was made, *en passant*, as to where Horace might happen to be, but it was soon announced by his sisters that he had started on a voyage of discovery in search of Mr. Fitz Tempest immediately after breakfast that morning. Luncheon over, the three ladies lost no time in setting off on their visiting expedition.

"Then you know nothing of this Lady Lyndon's family history?" asked Lady Fullerton, rather abruptly, after a long silence on her part, as they drove towards the Court.

"No, indeed," said her sister-in-law, to whom the query was addressed; "nor do I imagine there is much to be known. Mr. Denbigh, who has been acquainted with the family—I mean Sir Montague's—all his life, says she is an orphan; and he has never met any relation of hers, nor heard her speak of any."

"That was a strange will of her husband's,"

remarked Lady Fullerton, after another short pause.

"Yes—at least, it seems so; but possibly there may be family reasons for the proceeding which the world in general may not know; and at all events it places Lady Lyndon in a very honourable position as regards her husband's confidence in her."

"I think it places the son in a very unfortunate one," returned Lady Fullerton.

"Not if Lady Lyndon is to be depended on. She possibly only holds the power that his father might have thought him too young to be trusted with at the time of his death; and you must remember he was not the eldest son—he had never been brought up to consider himself as his father's heir."

"Surely Sir Vere must have done so after his brother's death?"

"I fancy not. From what I have heard Mr. Denbigh say on the subject, there were peculiar circumstances attending the elder boy's death—he was his father's favourite, and he never got

over it, nor ever reconciled himself to the idea of putting the younger son in the place left vacant by the loss of his eldest; but here we are—we are just coming to the lodge."

"Tell me," said Lady Fullerton hastily—"before we meet—is this Lady Lyndon as beautiful as she was said to be when in Rome?—because there is nothing to prevent her marrying again, and she may, I suppose, cut her son off with next to nothing? Is she that sort of person?"

"I should think not; but I know so little of Lady Lyndon, that it is presumptuous of me to give an opinion. She appears to me, from what I have seen and heard so far, to be a very devoted mother, as I hear she was a wife."

"Really," said Audrey, who had been listening attentively, and now broke into the discourse with a merry laugh—"this is a very perplexing case, Aunt Jane."

"Perplexing, my dear?" asked Aunt Jane, innocently.

"Yes, to be sure it is. Do not you see, we

cannot tell how to treat this Sir Vere in his anomalous position ? It appears he *may* be the most eligible of acquaintances with all these fine possessions, or, lacking them, may prove in himself nothing worth cultivating."

At that moment they were driving through the finely-timbered park, and a sudden turn in the road brought them within full view of the imposing-looking old house. Lady Fullerton bent forward to take a nearer survey, observing, as she did so,

"It is a finer-looking place than I had expected, and I hear the property is a very large one. What a shame there should be any doubt as to the young man inheriting it!"

"I should not think there was the least doubt," returned her sister-in-law quietly.

"Well, of course he *ought*; but if this lady, his mother, fell into wrong hands, there is no saying what might be the consequence."

"Then, mamma, I think, till she does, we may trust her good intentions towards her own son ; and as he *may* be a nice person himself,

we will give him the benefit of the doubt, particularly as Aunt Jane does not entertain any."

The carriage then drew up before the door, and on its being opened, they were informed that Lady and Miss Lyndon were at home.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE visitors were shown into the usual morning-room, where Lady Lyndon and her daughter were sitting, and occupied much in the same way as when we last saw them there. Clare seemed to be putting the finishing touches to her beautifully-executed drawing of wild flowers; whilst Lady Lyndon was sealing letters, sorting and putting away papers, preparatory to going out for the afternoon. She rose with rather more cordiality than usual to receive her guests, for she liked Lady Jane already, and was prepared to welcome anyone she brought with her. It was particularly the case in the present instance. As soon as she understood who the two ladies were, and Lady Fullerton explained that they had only arrived

the night before at the Grove, Lady Lyndon looked pleased and gratified at the *empressement* shown by the great lady in coming so immediately to make her acquaintance.

Whilst her mother and aunt were occupied with the lady of the house, Audrey devoted herself to Clare—claiming a sort of acquaintance on the ground of a certain dim recollection the two girls entertained of having seen each other with their respective governesses on sundry occasions when in Rome some years before. Audrey looked with undisguised admiration at the beautiful face of her newly-found friend, saying, as she did so,

“I will not say that I really remember you, Miss Lyndon, for you were a child then, and I was not much older ; and no doubt we are both extremely altered since then—grown up and improved, as we ought to be. But I think I should remember your brother, Sir Vere, better, for he came to our house two or three times, in charge of a charmingly clever Mr. Russell, which everybody liked.”

“ Yes, Mr. Russell was a general favourite, I believe, and Vere was, and is, much attached to him. He is lately married, and Vere has been staying with them at Mr. Russell’s new living.”

“ Oh, indeed ! Is Sir Vere there now ?”

“ Oh ! no ; I am expecting him in every moment. He is going to drive me somewhere in the pony-carriage, whilst mamma makes the tour of the parish with our clergyman’s wife, Mrs. Welby.”

“ Well, I confess I would rather be of your party—that is, if you would let me drive you. I delight both in riding and driving.”

“ Mamma does not wish me to ride,” returned Clare ; “ and I had much rather be driven than have the responsibility of driving myself.”

Audrey gave a quick, scrutinizing glance into the calm, beautiful face as Clare made this avowal, but only observed,

“ It is fortunate there is a diversity of tastes in the world—so we need not clash in our pursuits.”

Then she turned her attention to the drawing on the table beside her, and that led to a further discussion on painting in its various branches ; and Clare, who was an amateur, if not something of a connoisseur, brought out some of the many portfolios in the room; and whilst the two girls were so engaged, Sir Vere made his appearance. There was no introduction required in his case, and he seemed pleased to find Lady Fullerton and her daughter calling on his mother and sister. Lady Fullerton, having already, in her own mind, decided that the Lyndon family were worth the trouble of cultivating, made herself extremely amiable and pleasant to each member of the said family. There were various little reminiscences to fall back upon with Sir Vere—common acquaintances to be inquired after ; and though their own had been of the very slightest at the time, it seemed to have grown into a more intimate one during the years in which they had never met. It appeared, at least, Lady Fullerton's pleasure so to consider it ; and Sir Vere, as a very young man, and one

who had been but little in general society, could not help feeling flattered by the vivid recollection of the fashionable lady.

Lady Jane devoted herself, in her quiet, sensible manner, to Lady Lyndon, her all-unconscious rival in the years that were gone; whilst that lady, ever calm and self-possessed, but to a certain degree reserved and undemonstrative, felt more at ease in talking to Lady Jane than in following the discourse of her more lively and discursive sister-in-law. However, the whole party seemed to amalgamate by degrees, and got on exceedingly well. Lady Fullerton expressed her admiration of the fine old place, saying she had often heard her husband speak of it, and now she had seen it she could not help wondering that Sir Vere had been so long an absentee. That remark drew from Sir Vere the reply,

“I do not think we have been voluntary absentees; but my father’s state of health obliged him to live in a warmer climate.”

“Well, now you are come home at last, I hope

we may look upon you as a fixture in the county, for Hampden Castle is only twenty miles distant, so we must be neighbours, and good ones, I hope."

"Indeed I hope so," replied Sir Vere, quietly.

Lady Lyndon, happening to hear the remark and the reply, added,

"I think we are all glad to find ourselves settled at the old family place, and I hope my son's interest in it will increase as time goes on."

That was a most satisfactory observation, in Lady Fullerton's estimation, and removed any scruple she might feel as to ulterior considerations and destinations. There was something said about hoping to see them all at an early period, to stay at the Castle; and then, at Lady Fullerton's expressed wish, they went into some of the rooms to look at pictures of which she said she had heard. Audrey extended her excursions, under Clare's guidance, and went with her to inspect everything worth seeing in the old house, and would have taken a ramble out

of doors, had not her mother met them, and said it was time they should be going. Lady Jane heard Clare say, in her gentle, natural way,

“I am so sorry you are going to-morrow. I should have liked so much to go to the Grove and make your sister’s acquaintance as well as yours, and seen if we should also have remembered each other; but as you will be going early, there is no use in my thinking about it.”

It was strange that Clare did not, as usual, refer to her mother, but she seemed to feel instinctively that no objection would be made to her improving her acquaintance with the two Lady Hampdens. Lady Jane spoke in answer to Clare’s little speech.

“Why not come, then, to-day, my dear? There is no time like the present! Come to the Grove, and stay and dine with us this very day.”

Clare looked, as she felt, delighted with the proposal; and then Lady Lyndon was consulted, and, strange to say, made no objection, declin-

ing herself to join the party. After that there was more talking and discussion, and then the final arrangement was that Clare should go back with her new friends, and Sir Vere was easily persuaded to come at a later hour to dinner, and bring his sister back at night.

With a strange new sense of freedom and independence, Clare made her little preparation, quite wondering in herself at her mother's easy acceptance of the invitation so suddenly and unceremoniously given ; but she heard her say to Lady Jane,

“I very seldom part with Clare ; but there are a few occasions on which I am pleased and satisfied to do so, and this is one of them.”

Perhaps Lady Lyndon might not have been quite so ready to do so had she heard the order given to the coachman as her daughter took her place in the carriage with her new friends. This order was a very simple one, given by Lady Jane.

“By the way, John, we want to stop at the Cabin, and call on the Miss Tempests on our

road home." Then turning to her sister, she asked, " You still wish to call, Isabella ? "

" Oh ! by all means. I daresay you will not mind it, Miss Lyndon ? We will not stay long."

" Oh ! no, I should like it very much," said Clare, truthfully ; and to the Cabin they drove forthwith.

They found all the family at home, and Horace Hampden as well. He seemed to have been making good use of his time, for he was on the best possible terms with the whole party. Winnie was charmed with Fitz's young sailor friend, and delighted, as were the loving and admiring aunts, in hearing the enthusiastic praises bestowed by the frank-hearted boy on their darling Fitz. Then when the grateful mother made her appearance, how they all contrasted her warm cordial manner, and friendly style of conversation, with the frigid and languid thanks bestowed on poor Fitz by the Lady of Lyndon, for Lady Fullerton forgot all her finery and fashion for the time being, and was as simple and natural amongst her new ac-

quaintances as if they had been old and valued friends, instead of meeting for the first time !

As for Fitz, the hero of the hour, he was in a state of bewildering happiness—not on account of the unexpected distinction he had achieved (though no doubt he was pleased to be well and kindly thought of), but the unlooked-for presence of the one object who now occupied all his thoughts was like a glimpse of heaven to him. He had been prepared by his friend Horace for the advent of his mother, and was not surprised that she should be accompanied by his old acquaintance, Lady Jane Hampden. Neither was he overwhelmed with the sight of the daughter who was of the party, and joined with her mother in all the pretty flattering things it was her pleasure to say on the occasion.

It was the startling apparition, fair and tall and beautiful, of Clare Lyndon, that gave a dreamy sensation of undefined but intense happiness to the whole scene. Little did she imagine the wild joy that thrilled poor Fitz's

honest heart as she calmly gave him her hand, and joined in the conversation that was going on, and contributed to its interest by asking many little naïve questions, which were eagerly responded to by Horace Hampden, as they brought fresh honour and glory to his friend Fitz.

The moments flew all too quickly. Lady Jane began to fidget lest she should be wanted at home; and Lady Fullerton, having said everything she really felt on the occasion, announced herself ready to go home.

“But mind, Mr. Tempest, we shall expect you to come and see us before Horace leaves us. I know it will give Lord Fullerton real pleasure to make your acquaintance, so we must fix an early time; so please keep yourself disengaged.”

“You are very kind,” said Fitz; “but——”
“I really hope there will be no *but*, as no doubt we can make any time suit—that which will be most convenient to you, for I think you are not going away just yet.”

"No, I have some weeks still—till the end of the year. After that I expect my summons."

"Oh!" said Audrey, "you must come and see us before then."

"I should think so," amended Horace. "Why, I should come and fetch him, now he has given us a half promise."

"Are you going to sea again?" asked Clare, as the party broke up, and began to move towards the door, though rather delayed by many last words on the part of the Miss Tempests and their charming new acquaintance—which Audrey took advantage of to inspect, under the guidance of Winnie, some of the strange marine curiosities which encumbered the room.

"Yes, I hope so. My father's old friend, Captain Selby, has promised to take me as his flag-lieutenant; and it is a piece of promotion I shall be very thankful for," explained Fitz, as lucidly as his happiness would permit.

"Then you will be away a long time, I suppose?—I know sailors generally are," re-

turned Clare, who began to feel a certain degree of interest in this young man's destination.

"Three years," returned he; adding, "it seems a short time to look back upon, but a long time to look forward."

"Yes, indeed; so many things happen and change in the course of three years," said the young girl, thinking sadly of the father she had lost within that space of time, and the entire change it had made in their home arrangements.

"Yes, some outward things may change; but there are others that nothing can alter in this world," said Fitz, almost thinking aloud as he felt that an eternity of years would never render the recollection of Clare herself less vivid in his mind.

"I should hope not," replied Clare, following the bent of his thoughts, but not guessing the object of them, and reflecting more upon the course of her own experience, as she continued, "It would take many more than three years to forget those we have loved, and the remem-

brance of the happy days spent with them."

"Just so," said Fitz fervently. "I can answer for that in my own case, and I suppose it is the same with most of us."

"Well, we must say good-bye now," said Clare, as the elders of the party began to move on; and then, as by a sudden thought, she said timidly, with a beautiful blush—"I hope, Mr. Tempest, we shall see you and your sister sometimes at the Court. My brother, I know, hoped to call on you, and make his own petition."

When the words were out of her mouth, poor Clare felt almost alarmed at her own temerity in originating such a request, small and unimportant as it might seem, and natural under the circumstances; but she was so little used to take the smallest step by herself, or act except under her mother's suggestion, that she felt almost guilty of some act of insubordination now she was away from her control.

Fitz seemed to attach but little importance to the speech, taking it as a sort of matter of

civility, to be as generally answered as it was intended. So he contented himself with saying, as he walked beside Clare to the carriage—

“Thank you. Some day or other, I hope.”

There was nothing in his words to indicate for a moment the feeling of intense admiration with which his whole heart was filled; and as for any light words of flirtation, Fitz could no more have uttered them to Clare Lyndon than he could have behaved with irreverence to his Maker. There was a peculiar expression of purity and innocence about Clare Lyndon that harmonised with her uncommon style of beauty. This was further enhanced by her invariable style of dress. It had been her father's fancy, and it was still her mother's will, that Clare should always wear white. Thus, though her dresses were of every variety of material, and of the most exquisite freshness, and sometimes richness, still it was always white, relieved generally with coloured ribbons or flowers, arranged in the most tasteful manner.

It seemed, indeed, that Lady Lyndon spared no expense whatever in all that related to her daughter's toilette ; hence Clare always appeared in the greatest perfection of dress, though the colour—or non-colour—of the material was ever the same. Perhaps poor Fitz could not school his eyes as effectually as he had done his words, for when they met those of Clare as she again tendered him her hand before she got into the carriage, hers were quickly dropped, with a new perception of something in that gaze which caused a quick, pure blush to rise for a moment to her transparent cheek ; and then it deepened a little a moment afterwards, when she heard Lady Jane say, as she wished him good-bye in her turn—

“ By-the-bye, Fitz, why should not you come and dine with us this evening ? You will make Horace very happy, and we shall all be very glad to see you.”

The friendly invitation was as cordially accepted as it had been given, and then the carriage rolled away.

On arriving at home, Lady Jane hastened to her mother's room upstairs, where she had betaken herself in her absence, to acquaint her with the additions she had made to their dinner-party that day. She found the Dowager ready to welcome the new guests, saying,

"That will do very well, for the Denbighs happened to call, so I asked them both, as they know Isabella and all the party, and are often at the Castle; and I thought it would be an improvement on the family party of last night. I sent word to Cooper, not knowing whether there would be dinner enough; but I suppose there will?"

"Oh! yes—I have no fear for the dinner; but I will go myself and have a little talk with Mrs. Cooper."

And then Lady Jane bustled away, on hospitable thoughts intent; whilst the Dowager took a before-dinner nap, and the young party downstairs had a merry talk, and grew quite intimate over the five o'clock tea.

Then in due time came the pleasant, sociable

little dinner-party, where, seated at a round table, every one took the place he or she liked best, without form or ceremony. There it was that Clare, in her exquisite evening dress (her maid having been sent with it in the carriage that was to bring her home at night), appeared in even more dazzling beauty than ever—not only in poor Fitz's bewildered sight, but in the admiring eyes of all present. Still, like a singed moth—as he was to all intents and purposes—the devoted youth sought and obtained the place he coveted by her side at dinner; whilst Horace, with boylike ardour, emulated his friend in seizing eagerly upon the other, thus securing Fitz's vicinity also.

Then too it was Sir Vere, without any scheming or intention on his own part, found himself pleasantly seated between the two sisters, Constance and Audrey. They had all gained two or three years' experience in society since the days they recalled as having met in Rome; and those, on the young ladies' part, it must be allowed, had been spent to much profit.

If Vere Lyndon remembered them as pleasant, lively girls then, he found them now—especially Audrey—quite charming. He had not had much experience in women's society—especially such perfect women of the world as the two girls had become. Audrey was so amusing—her remarks so piquant that she quite threw her prettier cousin, Edith Hampden, into the shade; to say nothing of her sister, the Lady Constance, though she could be lively also when it suited her to exert herself.

On the present occasion, Constance dispensed her favours, with much impartiality, between Sir Vere on one side, and Bertram Denbigh on the other. Edith, quiet and cheerful as usual, shared Barry's attentions, but by no means appeared to think she had any right to monopolize them. In fact, Edith seemed as well pleased to leave her old friend Barry to her cousin Constance, whilst she turned her attention to the young man who sat between her and Clare Lyndon, and seemed, notwithstanding all

his endeavours, to be rather neglected by that young lady, as well as his friend Fitz.

There was, on the whole, a good deal of general conversation, Mr. Denbigh having to entertain the three elder ladies, and to do this he was obliged to call in the aid of his younger friends, which he managed very judiciously, and without breaking up or disturbing any tête-à-tête that looked particularly interesting.

And so that pleasant dinner drew to a close, and those who thought the time had passed very quickly, had to rise and separate for awhile. That time was, however, very brief, for the gentlemen soon joined the drawing-room party. And then there was music and more pleasant talk. And Clare Lyndon looked up from a portfolio of engravings that Edith had brought for her, and asked Fitz Tempest some little question concerning a shipwreck which she was examining with peculiar interest ; and then Fitz, having stood by for some time, and given the desired explanations, dropped into the seat which Edith relinquished on being

called upon by her cousins to play an accompaniment to the song they were going to sing.

Clare was startled from a very pleasant conversation in which she and Fitz were engaged, carried on in a low, soft murmuring tone, under cover of some inspiriting waltzes, with which Edith was refreshing her friends, after her cousin's more scientific music. She was startled by her brother's voice close at her ear. It seemed rather abrupt and harsh, after the gentler tones to which she had been listening, but he only said,

"Are there any engravings worth looking at there?"

Vere Lyndon cared more for the drawings than the singing, beautiful as it might be ; and the waltz music he might have liked, as an accompaniment to dancing, but not otherwise, so he turned to more attractive amusement, and joined his sister and Fitz at their portfolio. Soon after that the table on which it was placed became the centre of attraction, and Constance

and Audrey showed themselves quite as much at home in the picture-gallery as at the opera. And there, Sir Vere was well pleased to join them; and time flew quickly, whilst so employed, till at last Clare looked suddenly up and saw the timepiece pointing to a later hour than she had imagined, and then she said to her brother,

“Don’t you think mamma will be expecting us home?”

That little speech was the signal for a general break-up. Mr. Denbigh got up from his cosy corner on the sofa by Lady Fullerton the younger, and rang for his carriage, the Dowager woke up from her doze, and Lady Jane laid down her knitting, as the young people came up to her table and began to talk of taking leave.

Fitz was hovering near Clare, hoping to take her to the carriage and then walk home, as he had come on foot, when suddenly Sir Vere turned to him and asked,

“Cannot we take you home? for I think you said you walked here.”

Surely Fitz's good star was in the ascendant that happy day! However, he managed to get out his "Thank you very much; if I shall not be in your and Miss Lyndon's way," with tolerable composure of voice and manner. So that Sir Vere Lyndon little suspected the wild tumult of happiness with which his little act of courtesy was accepted. It was rather a silent drive. Vere Lyndon was not a person who made talk when he had nothing to say, and Fitz was more disposed to be mute than usual; and Clare—she, too, kept silence; and then, with a brief good-night, the brother and sister parted with their guest at the nearest turning to the end of the Cabin. After Fitz had taken his leave, Sir Vere, all unsuspecting, observed to his sister,

"I rather like that young fellow."

Clare returned after a moment's silence,

"You have good reason, I think, to do so."

"Oh! I was not thinking of that. I should, no doubt, have been obliged to him, or any one else, for doing me good service in such a case;

but it would not have made me like his individual self."

"No, I suppose not," said Clare demurely. And then the conversation dropped, till, just as they were entering the park, Clare roused herself from her state of abstraction and asked, "Which of the two Lady Hampdens do you like best, Vere?"

"I have not settled that point yet, Clare. I will tell you as soon as I know myself; at present I should say I rather fancy *Miss* Hampden the most, but may possibly change my opinion the next time we meet."

With that vague reply Clare was obliged to rest content. The brother and sister parted in the hall. Sir Vere went to his own apartments, which were up a separate staircase, and Clare proceeded to her mother's, before going to her own room, which was near. The room below was empty, Clare saw, as she took her candle from the hall table, near which the door of the morning room stood open, showing blank darkness within. Clare knew it was beyond her mother's usual

hour for retiring, and feared she would be dissatisfied with her for remaining so late. So she rapped timidly at the door of her mother's sleeping apartment, and stood waiting for an answer to her summons. No answer came; till Clare supposed her mother must be in bed and asleep. So, wishing to satisfy herself on that point, she carefully turned the handle of the door, and with a gentle step advanced into her room. A glance towards the bed, which was a small half tester one, showed it was unoccupied, and darkness reigned throughout the whole apartment. A slender streak of light, however, showed itself through the aperture of the further door, which opened into the dressing-room. Setting down her candle, Clare crept with noiseless steps towards that door. Gently opening it, she stood for a moment transfixed, as a sound as of weeping and sobbing met her ears. Then, looking into the dimly lighted chamber, she saw her mother kneeling by a small table, with an open miniature before her, and her arms spread out and supporting her head, as if it had been

laid upon them in the abandonment of some great grief. To see her mother's tears, she usually so calm and undemonstrative, struck Clare with a sudden thrill, as if it had been a stranger who had taken her mother's form and features, and she stood within the door, not daring to advance and yet fearing to retreat. Then a few words struggled for utterance, and Clare heard,

“For thy dear sake! yes! the smallest of thy wishes shall be obeyed, my best-beloved!”

Then Clare, unwilling to see or hear more, with noiseless tread withdrew, unheard and unseen, from her mother's room. In taking up her candle, her eye fell on a little tablet marking the day and month of the year; and then a sudden thought glanced across her mind as she carefully closed the door behind her.

“Surely—I had forgotten! this is the anniversary of my poor father's death.”

CHAPTER XVII.

IT was October ; getting towards the end of the month, which had been unusually bright and beautiful. There was a large party assembled at Hampden Castle, and the greater number of the persons who composed it were of note in the fashionable world. There were few indeed who had not made their mark in the world, in some way or other ; either in the world of society, politics, or letters—it was altogether a very successful gathering. With these great people this story has but little or nothing to do ; nor would they have been mentioned, save for some less noted individuals who were also there, and making their *début* in English society. These were the Lyndons—the

mother, son, and daughter. Lady Fullerton watched their progress in this new world, into which she had introduced them, with some degree of anxiety, mixed with curiosity. Had Lady Lyndon herself been a woman of any known family or connexions, it would have been all easy enough, for the recent death of the head of the family had naturally kept both the widow and the young people from mixing much in general society, and therefore, with that and their constant residence abroad, it was but natural that Sir Vere and his sister should be still unknown to fame and fashion, notwithstanding their undoubted pretensions to take their place as people of family and fortune in their own county.

But what of the Lady of Lyndon herself? It was awkward that she should be so entirely a novice in the great world. Nor could Lady Fullerton find out, from the strictest inquiry, that anyone she had ever known or heard of had claimed the honour of Lady Lyndon's relationship. She was, however, bent on patronizing

Sir Vere Lyndon, and too much depended on his mother to allow of her being neglected with impunity. She had made that voyage of discovery to Hilborough on purpose to see what the family were like.

It was one of old county celebrity, and there had been considerable intimacy between it and her husband's in former generations. The result had been on the whole very satisfactory. The Court was an unobjectionable inheritance. Sir Vere, who ought to be, and would be, no doubt, the possessor, was also perfectly unobjectionable on the whole. There might be a something wanting in him, which no doubt would soon be acquired by mixing freely in such society as that to which she now introduced him. Then, as to the sister, she was simply lovely, graceful, and all that a high-bred, beautiful English girl ought to be. Some one called her a frozen snowdrop, but no one denied her claims to all that has been advanced. Then, for the mother, she was still almost as beautiful in her matronly perfection as her daughter in her

youthful loveliness. Yet there was a certain reserve, almost stiffness, about the elder lady, a want of ease, though not of self-possession, that greatly detracted from the effect produced by her personal appearance. No one could however deny that Lady Lyndon was a sensible and well-informed woman. She was ready, yet not forward to talk ; she took her part in what was going on quietly, but without much show of interest or satisfaction to herself.

It was the first time Lady Lyndon had been into society since her husband's death, or had indeed ever mixed in that assembled in a large country house before. It was the best specimen of the kind of society that could be met with in an English nobleman's house. It fortunately happened that there were two or three foreigners of distinction amongst the guests at Hampden; and to one of these, a French nobleman of note, Lady Lyndon happened to be well known. He was a young man, but he remembered both her and Sir Montague at his father's well-known mansion in Paris, or appearing occa-

sionally at his mother's, La Duchesse de Z—, evening receptions.

It was the happiest thing that could have happened for the Lady of Lyndon. After this acquaintance became duly known and recognized, it enhanced Lady Lyndon's social value wonderfully. She seemed, too, to take pleasure in meeting the young Frenchman, who was a charming specimen of his nation; and it was only on seeing the admiring gaze he bent on her daughter's beautiful face that she felt inclined to regret for a moment they had met. There was no real danger, however; the young Duc was but the guest of a few days, and he passed on his way, deeply penetrated, no doubt, with the charms of Miss Lyndon, but making no sign.

Still his short visit had been of use; it told society that Lady Lyndon had been known in one of the best houses in Parisian society. Not the unhappy Paris of to-day, but in the palmy days of its unrivalled splendour, when the star of the great Emperor Napoleon III. was in its

ascendancy, and his brilliant Court was presided over by his beautiful, graceful, and gracious Empress. It was enough, and had Lady Lyndon been really more of a woman of the world than she was, she might have improved the occasion greatly; but she seemed to care but little what the great ladies and their lords thought of her. She went her own way with unruffled composure as regarded the society around her, but with unabated anxiety as to all that concerned her son and daughter. She appeared to consider it quite as incumbent on her to watch over and direct every thought, word, and action of their lives, and rule each circumstance and event of them, as when they were both little children, looking to her for their daily instruction.

With Clare this strict surveillance had produced, as yet, no worse effects than a certain restraint, almost timidity, of manner towards her mother; for she was naturally of a gentle, yielding disposition, and continued to honour and obey her as implicitly as in her childhood. It was difficult to say the exact amount of

consequences likely to arise from this unnatural state of things in a man of Sir Vere's temper and character. Lady Lyndon was herself afraid of assuming a too open dictatorship as regarded her son, having often seen that any attempt to bend him in any way contrary to his own will, seemed only to make him more decided in his opinions, and more dogmatic in his mode of expressing them. She had a certain control upon his power of action, from the peculiar circumstance of her husband's will, which left everything, as regarded matters of finance, in her hands. She therefore regulated the allowance she made her son in such a way as to entail the necessity of his living at home for the present with herself and his sister.

Perhaps the young man was not conscious of any wish to leave them, and set up a separate establishment for himself at that time; but, had he done so, it was very certain he lacked the means of carrying out such intentions. At the same time Lady Lyndon was ready to furnish him with such sums as he might require

for any temporary gratification, provided he specified his wishes, and laid all his plans before her, asking her advice and concurrence in them, when she would show the greatest liberality and readiness to give him what he might require. But there was the galling fact that everything must come through her, and from her hands. With many mothers placed in the same position as Lady Lyndon, the same thing would have been quite differently arranged. A more liberal and *certain* allowance would have given perfect liberty to the son, without in reality curtailing the mother's power over him. For it is very certain that over a grown-up son a mother's influence can only avail through his heart—that which emanates from the purse must be of a very spurious quality.

No one had, however, heard Sir Vere Lyndon complain either of his mother's love of dominion, or of his father's disposition of his property. Whatever his thoughts might have been, he kept them to himself, and on one occasion, when an

attempt at condolence was made, Sir Vere cut the matter very short by saying he was not born or brought up to inherit the property, and he should be sorry to gain any benefit from the loss of those who were. The untimely fate of his elder brother was a dark spot in Vere Lyndon's memory, and one that never recurred to him without bringing a sensation of anguish.

He was, at the time of which we speak, very well amused, and made his way with great success amongst his new friends. Perhaps the very *insouciance* of his natural manner, with its dash of careless decision, his usual style of speech being somewhat brusque, gained him more friends and admirers than had he laid himself out to be more generally amiable and agreeable, both as regarded men and women. But there was little doubt of his finding himself acceptable amongst the latter especially. What young man with tolerable good looks, of ancient family, and large unencumbered estate, with a fine old place, and some twenty thousand a year, but would win his way even in such

society as that in which he now found himself?

Lady Audrey Hampden was charmed with her new acquisition. She looked upon Sir Vere as her special property, and so caused him to be regarded by most of the guests then assembled at the Castle. Her sister Constance did not dispute the prize; she was, in fact, intent on something or some one else, on her own account. She considered, too, that Audrey, who had accompanied her mother in her expedition to Lyndon Court, and there discovered this charming family, had the best right to any advantage likely to result therefrom. She gave her sister only one word of counsel on the matter.

“Only take care what you are about, Audrey, and make sure of the delightful place you talk of, as well as the delightful man that ought to own it.”

“I have no fears on that point,” returned Audrey. “I am certain Lady Lyndon would like me for a daughter-in-law above everything; and she as good as told mamma, if her son

married according to her wishes, she hoped to see him settle at the old family place."

"Ah, yes!—very likely; but that might mean with her—and that would never do, Audrey."

"Oh! no. Lady Lyndon told mamma some other time she infinitely preferred the place, somewhere on the south coast, where she had lived with her husband, and where he and her eldest son are buried."

"No!—did she say all that, Audrey? I can hardly fancy her being so confidential, even with mamma."

"But she was so, I assure you, Connie. She and mamma have become quite intimate; and what I tell you was not said all at once in so many plain words, but dropped at different times and seasons."

"Well, all that is very satisfactory, and I can quite fancy that Lady Lyndon would be thankful to see both her son and daughter well married, as they really seem to know no one. Not but that your Sir Vere could very soon

command the best society ; and as for that girl, his sister Clare, she is positively lovely, and yet no one seems to fall in love with her."

" Except Horace," said Audrey, laughing. " If he were ten years older, I should say that was quite a case. She really talks more to that boy than to anyone else."

That was very true, even as the sisters had said. Clare Lyndon seemed more pleased with the boyish attentions of the young mid than ready to listen to any of the more eligible young men who were *épris* with her beauty, though chilled by her coldness. There were two or three of great pretensions then staying at the Castle; but whilst everybody was unanimous in admiration of her statuesque beauty, it did not appear to inspire any warmer sentiment. It was strange, however, that that boy Horace could at any time gain Clare's ear and win a smile from her exquisite lips, and at some of his recitals her beautiful eyes would light up with a lustre that quite enraptured the young sailor. How often he repeated the

well-known tale of his perils in the deep, when he fell overboard, and was rescued by that courageous Fitz Tempest ; and then through all his subsequent fever and illness (for he was all but dead) how tenderly did the same kind friend watch over and nurse him ! To hear all this most seriously did Clare Lyndon incline, and little did the boy himself dream of the interest that attached to his tale beyond that of his own individual suffering and danger. Still, the grateful lad was fond of dwelling on and expatiating upon the merits of his friend and preserver ; and from him Clare heard that Fitz Tempest had been already staying at the Castle. It was a “very jolly time,” Horace informed his attentive hearer ; but he had been gone long before they came. Perhaps Miss Lyndon had seen him since he returned to Hilborough. Then, recollecting himself, he added —No, that was not likely, for Admiral Bingham met Mr. Tempest at the Castle, and he was to go and stay at his place before he returned home.

Clare was glad to hear that explanation of her new friend's absence, for she herself knew so little of the outer world, and as Mr. and Mrs. Welby had been away for the last month, she had never heard a word either of Winnie or of her brother; and it seemed to her as if her mother purposely avoided all mention of the Tempest family. Vere was never very communicative; and for the last month they had lived very much to themselves. So this little insight into the history of what Fitz Tempest was doing all that time was at least rather satisfactory.

The pleasant days sped quickly away at the Castle. The chief part of the great people went their ways, one to one gay house, another to another, and a third set went home to entertain friends in their turn.

The Lyndons and a few others stayed on, being pressed to do so. Both Clare and her mother thought the party grew much pleasant-er as it became smaller and less grand. There was less fashion and more freedom. At least, so those inexperienced ones thought.

Lady Fullerton had taken much pains to cultivate an intimacy with Lady Lyndon. No one was better fitted for the undertaking than the lady of the castle.

There were many people who did not like her, and the Dowager had been one of them. But even she had altered her tone exceedingly since the visit it had pleased her step-daughter-in-law to make, for her own pleasure.

The simple fact is that Lady Fullerton could be the most kind, cordial, charming person in the world, when it suited her, and she liked the person, and thought it worth her while; as, on the contrary, she could be cold, discouraging, and disagreeable when so inclined.

When the Lyndons first came, she observed Lady Lyndon with some curiosity. There was a certain degree of mystery attached to her marriage, and her history before and since. That there was nothing of a disgraceful nature at all, was abundantly testified in what she had heard from Mr. Denbigh, and all who had known her as Sir Montague's wife. She knew

that Sir Montague had behaved ill to Jane Hampden in long years past, and heard it was for the sake of some obscure little girl, who had nothing but her beauty to recommend her. Lady Fullerton looked curiously on the face and form that had won Jane's early lover from his allegiance to her, and then she wondered what the potent spell besides had been that had induced the master of Lyndon Court to show such enduring love and affection after death, by leaving her the undisputed mistress of all his broad possessions.

At first Lady Lyndon responded rather shyly to these advances on the part of her hostess, as if she hardly understood the drift and purpose of such extra cordiality. She was evidently rather distrustful by nature. She weighed things well in the balance before she allowed herself to trust in their reality, and to value them accordingly.

Whilst she was studying Lady Fullerton, that lady made many notes and observations respecting her guest.

When she saw the indifferent coldness with which the still beautiful woman received anything like attention or compliment, she smiled to herself as she thought how groundless were the fears that pointed to the possibility of a second marriage, or any chance of alienation of Sir Vere's splendid inheritance. There was no mistaking the genuine indifference displayed by the Lady of Lyndon towards anything like admiration for herself. Nay more, Lady Fullerton felt persuaded that any such demonstration persisted in would produce positive feelings of aversion towards the admirer. Bold indeed would that man be who, in the face of such evident distaste, would venture upon addressing Lady Lyndon with his unwelcome attentions.

On the other hand, she was very quick-sighted as to any attention that was paid to her daughter, or by her son. It was perhaps some sort of suggestion, too delicately whispered to be startling, and by whom or how made Lady Lyndon could hardly have told afterwards; but the fact was assumed of Lady Fullerton's desire

to see a near connection between the families, should Sir Vere's attentions to her daughter be (as no doubt they would) favourably received. That remark opened his mother's eyes to the true nature of all the attention that was being lavished on her by her charming hostess. As soon as the idea was fully brought home to her, she locked it up, without saying a word in her own heart for a day or two, and dwelt upon it in all its bearings. It was hardly an entirely new one; but it was almost perplexing to see her visions realized. From that moment she thawed towards Lady Fullerton; they had the same hope and object.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A S soon as Lady Lyndon had fully mastered the idea that there was a possibility of Audrey Hampden's becoming her daughter-in-law, she turned her attention very pointedly towards that young lady herself. Audrey saw through it all, and was well satisfied to lend herself to the inspection; though it is to be feared she took rather a mischievous pleasure in mystifying Sir Vere's mother as to the real bent of her tastes and pursuits.

"There is something so very matter-of-fact about that pretty lady," Audrey would say, laughing, when Lady Fullerton would half reproach her volatile daughter with never speaking seriously, "that I cannot resist the temptation of a little fun at her expense."

“Lady Lyndon,” answered the cautious mother, “may be, as you say, a little peculiar and precise; but for all that she is a sensible and shrewd woman, and knows pretty well what she is about, and what other people are, I suspect.”

“Too much so for my taste, mamma; and that is the reason I object to being brought to book in that methodical way;” adding, after a short pause, “But, after all, she may be mistaken.”

“How do you mean, Audrey—as to her son’s intentions, or your own?”

“Oh! I don’t mean anything in particular, or rather anything so very particular as our mutual intentions.”

“Nonsense, Audrey; don’t talk so foolishly to me; you have been encouraging—I may say, drawing Sir Vere Lyndon on to pay you attention ever since he came, and now you talk as if you had not made up your mind to accept him.”

“Well, mamma, I can promise you to make

up my mind when he makes an offer ; but I do not think it will be just yet."

" Do you think Sir Vere does not feel certain enough about his present prospects to venture to make you an offer ?"

" He never said anything of the kind to me, mamma," said Audrey, rather provokingly, knowing at the same time that Lady Lyndon's implied expectations were as well known to her mother as herself, and she had no doubt to Sir Vere also.

Lady Fullerton was desirous that no time should be lost in securing so desirable a prize for the daughter who had already run the gauntlet of three or four London seasons ; and she had settled in her own mind that in the succeeding one she should appear as a bride, whilst her pretty sister, the Lady Mildred, should take her place. All this was fully arranged in the maternal mind, and it only remained for Sir Vere to make the first step, and then—all would be as complete as she could desire.

About that time the Denbighs came on a visit

to the Castle. They had been asked during the earlier part of Lady Lyndon's visit on purpose to meet her, but being engaged at the time, their coming had been deferred till then.

There were still a few visitors, for guests kept coming and going, though there was by no means so large a party as when the Lyndons first came. Lady Fullerton was also expecting her brother Lord Tudor, who had been too fully occupied to come before then; and even at that time he left the day and the hour of his arrival in a pleasing state of uncertainty. Mr. Denbigh and his son were pleasant additions to the party; they knew everyone who happened to be staying at the Castle, and everyone was glad to see them.

Not least amongst that number was the Lady of Lyndon herself. Notwithstanding all her cool self-possession amongst strangers, and in society to which she was almost a novice, still it was with a sensation of positive relief that she heard of the arrival of Mr. Denbigh and his son Barry. To see an old familiar face, and

that of her husband's oldest and best-loved friend, and to talk of past times and discuss present ones with all the ease of intimate acquaintanceship, was a real refreshment to one who had so little in common with the large fashionable set of people she had encountered at her first coming.

Lady Fullerton was a little curious—from some remarks and observations dropped by the Dowager—to see the exact terms on which Sir Montague's beautiful widow and his chosen friend might happen to be. Not that she entertained any fears, should their friendship be likely to culminate in a nearer and dearer bond, that such an event would be in any way prejudicial to her son's interests. Mr. Denbigh was too well off himself to wish to despoil Sir Vere. Still Lady Fullerton, in her wish for general information, regarded the meeting of the two friends with peculiar attention. Nothing *could* be quieter or more undemonstrative than the manner of both, though it was Lady Lyndon who said, looking calmly glad the while—

"It is such a pleasure meeting you here. I only heard yesterday that you and Bertram were expected."

Then Mr. Denbigh, in his little pleasant cordial way, replied—

"I knew that you were all here, which made me doubly desirous not to delay our visit."

So the old friends seemed satisfied with their position as such for the time being.

It happened that Edith Hampden was invited, and came about the same time. It was rather a novelty for her to be asked to the Castle when anything gay or pleasant was going on; but it was in consequence of a little hint from Lady Jane, as to the suspected state of affairs between her and Barry Denbigh, that Lady Fullerton, who really liked her niece, gave that little helping hand to bring such a desirable event about, saying, as she did so, to her husband—

"You see, they are only a party of women at the Grove, and cannot now be always asking young Denbigh to go there and meet Edith, as

they used to do when they were both children."

So Edith came, all unsuspecting as to the cause, and with the Dowager's full and free consent. It was a very pleasant and sociable party that were then and there assembled, although there were no "grandees." There were two Miss Herveys, daughters of Sir John Hervey, friends of the Fullertons, living in the neighbourhood—the two girls came with their brother, Captain Hervey—and a few other young people of no particular note.

It so happened that some of them were lately come from a very gay house on the other side of the county, where private theatricals had been the order of the day; and now they had left the place, had brought with them the mania they had acquired for acting. Nothing of the kind had ever been attempted at Hampden Castle; but the infection spread rapidly, and all were more or less bitten by it. It took Audrey's fancy especially. Lady Constance rather demurred about joining the acting party, as she had no particular turn for learning by

heart; nor had she much ambition to appear in any character save her own. At the same time she thought it would be very good fun to get up something of the kind, for it was November then; the days got dark long before the evening, and it was apt to rain in the morning. So it was determined to get up a play amongst themselves; and Lady Fullerton consenting, there was to be a large party invited to witness the performance; the whole to conclude with a dance.

Lord Fullerton, hearing what was in contemplation, only begged that the intending performers would confine themselves and their preparations to one end of the house, where they would be out of sight and hearing, until the auspicious moment came for their appearance in public.

The young people desired nothing better. Some rooms were assigned to them at the further end of one of the distant wings of the Castle. There they might exercise their talents and ingenuity in the construction of a temporary stage and theatre; one of the house-car-

penters, and as many assistants as were required, being pressed into the service.

It happened that nearly all the members of this amateur theatrical corps were well acquainted, but it may be supposed that, were they not, there was every facility for becoming so in the intimate way they were all thrown together for such a purpose. There were many preliminaries to be arranged before these *dramatis personæ* could shake down comfortably into their places, and take the parts assigned to them, and set to work in earnest. The great point was of course to select the play to be acted, and then to cast the parts.

In the midst of all this there was one unanimous opinion, and that was to allot the most prominent female character to Miss Lyndon. There was no opposition made to that suggestion—men and women all said or looked the same thing—there was no doubt Clare's beauty and grace ought to take the first place.

Audrey was pleased to make this decision known to Sir Vere, telling him what the general

feeling was on the occasion. He listened to her in silence for a minute, then, twirling his dark moustache with a thoughtful air, as was his custom when revolving any weighty matter in his mind, he replied,

“I am afraid that will not do. Clare would not be equal to the undertaking herself; and if she were, her mother would object.”

“Oh! I’ll undertake to get Lady Lyndon’s leave,” said Audrey, lightly; “and, for the rest, I am sure your sister could not fail—her very appearance in the part would bring down no end of applause.”

Sir Vere’s looks thanked the animated girl for this tribute to his sister’s beauty; but he only replied,

“You can accomplish a great deal. I do not doubt that, Lady Audrey—but I fear you will not be able to persuade my mother.”

“Well, we will see. And what part will you take?” naming the play that was nearly decided upon by a chosen committee composed

of those who had originated the plan, and were themselves experienced performers.

“Oh! I don’t care—I’ll leave that to you and your friends.”

“I know,” said Audrey, after a slight pause, and with a little hesitation—“I know what part I should like you to have, but Captain Hervey, I see, wants it for himself.”

“Then why not let him have it, and give me another? I will leave my fate in your hands, and trust to any decision you make for me.”

It was not very wise in Sir Vere to make that little speech if he meant nothing by it; for it was very clear that Audrey thought for a moment of a more serious part to be played out than that she was just then discussing; but she was quite equal to the occasion, so she looked up with a little conscious, gratified air, that became her very well, and replied, laughing,

“Now I shall be afraid of choosing your part! —the idea of unlimited power is always alarming.”

“You would not abuse it.”

“Yes, I might ; against my own better judgment, I might give you some ridiculous part to play.”

“Well, if there are such parts to be undertaken, I do not see why I should not make myself ridiculous as well as another person.”

“Because I do not think that is exactly your *métier* ; there are other people here much better gifted for such a *rôle* than you.”

“I have told you I have no choice, you shall decide for me.”

“Then,” said Audrey, in rather a hurried manner, “you shall have that part—the one Captain Hervey wants—because—because I believe I am to have the woman’s part—I mean—I had rather he did not make love to me even in play !”

After Audrey had said this, she laughed, as if turning the whole matter into joke, and, before Sir Vere could speak again, said,

“And now I must go on my mission and find your mamma.”

After she was gone Vere Lyndon stood with

the book she had brought him in his hand ; and with sudden recollection he opened the pages and sought the play she had named, and found a light pencil mark against the characters and scenes in which they appeared together. As he read on, his brow contracted, his mouth became compressed, and he found himself muttering the impassioned sentences which were thus designated. He read on to the end, and, as he laid down the book, he said to himself, “ Neither should *I* like to hear those words addressed to Audrey Hampden, even in a play ; but ought I myself to say them to her ? ”

Leaving Sir Vere to debate this important matter in his own mind, Lady Audrey without hesitation proceeded to find Lady Lyndon, and make her request as regarded her daughter appearing in their forthcoming performance. Lady Lyndon, who was at the moment in her own room preparing for a walk, laid down her bonnet and listened without putting in a word, till Audrey had concluded. In measured tones she then made answer.

"My dear Lady Audrey, you would astonish my daughter by such a request. She is a perfect novice in all such matters, has never been to a theatre in her life, and has as much idea of acting—as—as—I have."

"Well, I daresay you would have a charming idea of it, dear Lady Lyndon, if you chose to turn your attention that way; but I fear there would be no use in trying to persuade you."

Lady Lyndon shook her head, looking a little aghast, as she murmured "I should think not indeed."

"Well, but now as to Clare,—you must listen to me, dear Lady Lyndon."

"Perhaps, Lady Audrey, it will be the best way for you to listen to her yourself?"

Then Lady Lyndon opened the door into the adjoining room, where Clare was sitting writing a letter to her old friend and relation, Mrs. Montague; and calling her into the conference, stated in few words the request that had just been made.

Clare heard in silence, and then looked in mute

astonishment from one to the other; and finding an answer was expected, said,

“ I hope, mamma, you do not wish me to act, for I really could not do it, and I should quite spoil your play, Lady Audrey, for I never saw a play acted in my life, and should break down if I attempted anything of the kind.”

Audrey saw there was no use in pursuing the subject, vexed as she was to relinquish it, and the sensation she felt sure Clare’s extreme beauty would produce. How she wished she could manage a scene for her, in which she would have nothing to say, but might only be looked at. Audrey had a good deal on her hands just then, for her own affairs were, she considered, beginning to assume something of a decided shape and character. She therefore looked into the library, where she had left Sir Vere to study his part (in more senses than one), on the chance that she might yet find him so engaged. She was not doomed to disappointment; he was standing, still book in hand, at a distant window. At the noise made by the opening of

the door he looked round, and saw the object of his meditations advancing, with a little heightened colour.

“I think I left my book here, Sir Vere.”

“Yes, you gave it me to look at.”

“Well, have you come to any decision respecting the part?” asked Audrey in a careless tone.

“Yes, I have.”

“Well, may I inquire, is it to be passed over to Captain Hervey, or will you kindly undertake it?”

When Audrey chose to be persuasive, there was something very taking in her manner, and Vere Lyndon felt it in his heart as he had never felt it before. It was certain the sentiments of the play she had given him to read had been wonderfully successful in enlightening him as to the nature of his own.”

“I will undertake it on one condition—that you keep to the part you mentioned as yours, and with which this is concerned.”

“Oh! yes; I suppose that must be my part.

There are a few idiotic things to be said and done in it, but that, I suppose, must always be the case in these matters. But I think, notwithstanding, if we cut out a little here and there, we shall manage to get through it."

Vere Lyndon was about to speak, and then checked himself, asking, after a pause,

"Well, what success with my mother?"

"As bad as possible. Neither she nor your sister will entertain the idea of her acting for a moment. It really is a great pity. I was so anxious she should appear—it would have rendered our whole performance famous; and now I am so disappointed; but I quite see she *could* not act or speak in public. I am so sorry!"

"And so am I, if you are vexed about it," said Sir Vere, more gently than his wont, adding—"I know she has never even seen any acting. The only approach to that kind of thing is, she took part once at Mrs. Montague's in some *tableaux*; and she made a very lovely subject, I must say, in some that were arranged for her."

“Oh! thanks, Sir Vere!” said Audrey, clapping her small hands with girlish exultation—“that will be the very thing to finish up our performance with—a few artistic, well got-up *tableaux*, in which your sister will, I know, take part, to oblige me, if you will ask her.”

Sir Vere, signifying his acquiescence, the matter ended there, and they parted.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE days sped merrily on, and the play was in full progress. The parts were all cast. There was to be a drama in three short acts, and then a farce in one, and after that a few beautifully-arranged *tableaux* were to end the performance. Some of the younger children were to take part in the latter, so the excitement spread even to the quiet regions of the school-room, whilst more than one flirtation amongst the young people elsewhere had been the result of the contemplated entertainment.

Lady Lyndon was beginning to weary for her quiet home again, and Clare was very willing to return thither; but no one could think of

leaving the Castle till this play was over.

Lady Fullerton imagined she fulfilled her duties as chaperon to her daughters by looking in from time to time into the room called by courtesy the "green-room," where, as it happened, she was well amused with all she saw and heard ; so she accomplished her task without much self-denial or trouble. Lady Lyndon, on the other hand, kept her daughter more closely than ever by her side ; and as Clare was a little curious as to what might be going on amongst the acting community (which nearly embraced the whole of the assembled company at the Castle), it was, to say the least, slightly irksome. It was a great relief, when called upon by her brother, to hear him recite his part, and on one or two occasions she had the further satisfaction of superintending those scenes where Audrey made her appearance, and they both made love to each other. Lady Lyndon was never present on those occasions. It was when Clare happened to be alone in the drawing-room or elsewhere, that one or other of the

two would look in with, "Oh ! if you have really nothing to do, and it won't bore you very much, will you let me say my lesson to you ?" That was generally from Audrey. Vere's mode of proceeding was less ceremonious.

"Now, then, Clare, hold the book, and play the prompter's part, please."

Clare felt glad to be of use, for she did not quite like being shut out from all the fun that was going on. At the same time, she would have shrunk in horror from playing Audrey's part before an immense party, and saying things to an indifferent person which seemed to her like desecration of the sentiment expressed. As it was, she felt quite uncomfortable for Lady Audrey, when it came to her turn to be addressed by her brother in those passionate words.

Vere Lyndon performed his part very well ; he liked it ; it was pleasant to act the rôle of lovers to and with Audrey Hampden, and so he went through his little performance *con amore*, whilst she played her part very prettily. Perhaps, if either of them had been very seriously

in earnest, they would have found more difficulty in performing their parts.

It was owing to a slight cold Clare had caught that she was thus left by herself, when her mother went out for her daily walk. This was generally taken with the English governess and school-room party, with whom Lady Lyndon had lately become acquainted. During the very gay time in the earlier part of the visit, the young ladies, three in number, with their two governesses, had been kept quite out of sight. But since the number of guests had become so much smaller, the school-room party made their appearance in the drawing-room every evening.

Lady Lyndon happened to find a former acquaintance in the Italian girl who taught music, dancing, and her own language to the three younger Lady Hampdens. She was the daughter of an obscure Italian artist in Rome, and had been patronized by Sir Montague Lyndon, who beguiled his hours of weary languor by interesting himself in works of art. This daughter, Lorina Bernotti, had been engaged to give

Clare some lessons in singing, and was at the same time employed in a similar way in the family of Lord Fullerton. After her father's death she became engaged as a permanent governess in the family, and had accompanied them back to England. So to their surprise Lady Lyndon and Clare recognized their old protégée in the Italian governess at the Castle. This, in the first instance, brought the school-room party under Lady Lyndon's especial notice; and the kindness with which she greeted the girl who had been known to her in her husband's life-time, owed perhaps as much to her tender remembrance of all that was associated with his memory as to any particular impression left by Lorina herself.

As Lady Lyndon became better acquainted with the different inmates of the school-room, she found herself much attracted by the English governess, who presided over the whole party, and with her she made acquaintance of a very congenial kind. Miss Ainslie had been about four years in her present situation. She had

succeeded the showy, fascinating, talented little Frenchwoman who had superintended the education of Lady Constance and Audrey. That lady would have found her position very *triste*, had she been left as much to herself as was Miss Ainslie, after her two elder pupils grew up and entered into the world. Lady Fullerton also, being much more from home, no doubt acted wisely in promoting Madame St. Amande to another situation, and engaging a quiet, clever, middle-aged Englishwoman to supply her place with the younger girls. Lady Lyndon could not help wishing, with a sigh, that Audrey had been brought up by Miss Ainslie instead of Madame St. Amande. However, being a sensible woman, Miss Ainslie took things as she found them, even humouring the theatrical mania when it became rife all over the house which it certainly did, notwithstanding Lord Fullerton's decree, which tended to confine it within a certain locality. But, like any other infectious disease, it spread far and wide. It was even whispered that there was a dis-

play of dramatic talent in the lower house, not much inferior to that exhibited by their betters above. The children, too, who were to appear in the *tableaux* at the close of the representation, clamoured to be allowed to act a French play in the school-room, such as they remembered in the days when Madame St. Amande ruled there; and, to Lady Lyndon's surprise, Miss Ainslie consented, and their French studies were directed accordingly.

"Better let them do it, Lady Lyndon; they will take the disease in a milder form—something like vaccination instead of smallpox. If I attempted to restrain their present theatrical bent, Lady Mildred might break out, and, in some way or other, get herself enrolled amongst the *corps dramatique* elsewhere. I wish to keep her away from that sort of thing whilst she is under my care."

"Well, you may be right so far, Miss Ainslie; but I should adopt a rather more peremptory plan, and by putting a veto on plays altogether show my opinion of the whole thing."

“And I may ask the *cui bono* of such a proceeding, my dear lady, on my part, when everyone about us is of a contrary way of thinking?”

“You see *I* practice as *I* preach,” returned Lady Lyndon. “I keep my daughter entirely separate from this theatrical disturbance.”

“Yes, that is very easy. You are the mother, and have a right to counsel, and expect obedience; whilst I can but do the best I can under the circumstances.”

“I do not *counsel*, I direct and control,” returned Lady Lyndon, with a slight flush on her delicate cheek. “I have brought up my child to have no will, no separate will, of her own; so now I can turn and regulate her mind just as I see best and most fitting.”

“Her *actions*, you mean, dear lady; the human mind is no mere machine—even in a mother’s hand—and you may suppose it is still less so in that of a governess.”

Lady Lyndon held many such discussions with Miss Ainslie, whose pleasant manners and cheerful good-sense took a strong hold on her

imagination, even when they differed, as widely as they often did; in their theories on the same subject. On one thing they agreed; and that was, in an earnest desire to benefit the poor about them, but even in this pursuit their ideas were often opposed.

Miss Ainslie was always desirous of taking one or more of her pupils with her when she visited the schools or cottages around them ; and Lady Lyndon never failed to ask to be of the party on those occasions, though she observed one day to her new friend,

“I do not see the use or good of taking the young people with us.”

“Do not you?” said Miss Ainslie, in reply. “I consider, in the present case, the daughters of the house here are, or ought to be, much more nearly and deeply concerned in the poor around them than it falls to my lot to be; so surely it is as well to bring them up to take an interest in their welfare, and become acquainted with all their wants.”

“That is the department of their elders, and

I do not approve of young people being brought up to form their own opinions, and act upon them, independently."

" Well, perhaps not independently, as yet. I expect these young ladies to consult me as to the distribution of their alms, or in the choice of the clothing they are inclined to bestow on their poor neighbours."

" But, surely, Lady Fullerton sees to all that," interrupted Lady Lyndon, who seemed to think it tended to a breach of privilege, that the governess and her pupils should take such important matters in hand themselves, instead of leaving them to the lady of the castle, or, in her absence, to the clergyman's wife.

" Oh yes; at stated times there are great distributions of all needful things to the poor; but I do not wish my young people to rest content with the idea of family benevolence—I wish each child to learn to act for herself, and unselfishly to give according to her ability. It is very needful in this case, as no doubt each one of these young ladies will at some future period

be called upon to fill some of the high places in the land, where many will be dependent upon them, and they will have much to bestow."

Lady Lyndon then thought of Audrey, and spoke according to her thoughts.

"It does not strike me, from what I have heard her say on the subject, that Lady Audrey would care much for the poor on her estate."

"Ah, we must not judge Lady Audrey by what she says now; she has not been trained as yet to think much about them; but that is no reason why, under other circumstances, such interests should not engage her attention."

"Perhaps so," said Lady Lyndon; then, after a pause, she added, "I have never allowed my daughter to visit amongst, or teach the poor; I have my own reasons; I do not wish her to have independent interests and pursuits—at least, not hitherto. It is my intention, as time goes on, gradually to associate her with myself in such works as I think will be beneficial, directing her myself on every essential point."

"Are not you afraid that the absence of all

independent power of action will fetter her inclinations, and annihilate all interest in the pursuit?"

"We shall see," said Lady Lyndon, deliberately; "if more liberty seems necessary when the time comes, I must use my own judgment and act accordingly."

"And, in the meantime, Miss Lyndon's mind must remain like a sheet of blank white paper," said Miss Ainslie, laughing, as if she could hardly believe in her companion seriously meaning all she said.

"Yes, in that matter I do; I wish to write there myself all I think it best for her mind to entertain."

Miss Ainslie often felt provoked at what she could not help considering the narrow-minded self-sufficiency of the beautiful lady; and yet there was under it all such an earnestness of purpose, tending to what she considered right and good, with perfect unconsciousness of what she advanced being in the least strange or unreasonable, that the amiable governess, clever

and superior as she was in many things to the Lady of Lyndon, could not refuse to bestow on her the companionship sought with such flattering assiduity. Besides this, let Miss Ainslie say what she might, or differ as positively as she often did, Lady Lyndon was never ruffled or put out of temper; and she never for a moment seemed to think she condescended to a person so differently situated from herself.

It was quite plain she sought Miss Ainslie's society for the pleasure it gave her. She appeared, too, to take far more real interest in the concerns of the poorer class than in the affairs, public or private, of any of the great people who visited at the Castle, and would often question Miss Ainslie minutely about these short and simple annals of the poor around them. On one occasion, Lady Lyndon made a point of accompanying Miss Ainslie on a shopping expedition to the nearest large town, where she was going on her own account, also, to buy some village clothing. When there, Lady Lyndon not only gave her the benefit of advice she did

not require, but visited the hospital and made a liberal donation besides. It was in driving from that place, through the oldest part of the town, that Lady Lyndon suddenly said, "Oh, do stop!—is not that the 'Feathers Inn,'" looking out with a strange eager gaze upon the house.

"Yes, it is a quaint old place; do you wish to look at it?—we can go in if you do."

Then seeing Lady Lyndon turn pale, Miss Ainslie said, as she pulled the check-string,

"You are tired, dear lady, we will go there and get out; you can rest an hour."

"Oh, no, I have seen enough, thank you, let us go on."

Miss Ainslie then asked, "You seem interested in the place; perhaps you have been here before?"

Lady Lyndon only answered in a low voice, "My husband used to go there often when on his way to the Castle;" and then Miss Ainslie remembered hearing that Sir Montague had been frequently in that neighbourhood before his marriage, so said no more, and the subject

dropped. But Lady Lyndon was a curious study to the good governess, and so was her lovely daughter; she sometimes fancied she could detect an absent pre-occupied look in the girl's eyes, and wondered if her heart were really as untouched as her mother supposed, and intended it to be ; and thinking, if it were not so, what would be her mother's consternation, when preparing to endorse her own wishes and sentiments upon the supposed blank tablets of her daughter's heart, the page were discovered to be already closely inscribed, and in an unknown character. And then Miss Ainslie found herself speculating a little—as to the Lady of Lyndon's own antecedents, and the bringing up and course of education that had led to such curious results in her own character.

Perhaps it was well for Lady Lyndon that some remarks dropped by Miss Ainslie opened her eyes a little as to what the public opinion might be, as to the lengths to which she was disposed to carry her maternal influence, and induced her, with her natural shrewdness of obser-

vation, to resolve to display her tactics less openly, even were she determined to adhere to them more closely. Whilst she pondered over Miss Ainslie's views, and wondered what Lady Audrey and her son were thinking about, the latter came one day to ask for her consent—not to his suit—but to his sister's making her appearance in a tableau which he had devised for her special benefit. He knew it was politic to apply in the first instance to his mother; for he had no doubt of Clare's consent, as she had already taken the part in the picture he now proposed. Sir Vere Lyndon laid the matter with much brevity before his mother, merely as a request of his own. Lady Lyndon looked up from some work she was embroidering and calmly replied,

“I do not wish Clare to make an appearance in any character but her own, next Thursday evening.”

“Do let her unbend a little, mother; even the little girls are to appear in a group, and will make such a pretty tableau.”

“They will form a group amongst themselves which will be less objectionable, but I do not like Clare to act with strangers, or be mixed up with them even in dumb show.”

“I promise that shall not be the case; no one but myself shall join in Clare’s tableau.”

“I do not like the sort of thing, Vere. Why will you persist in asking it?”

“Because, mother, I have promised Lady Audrey; and as it seems so ungracious to refuse so trifling a concession, and to cast a censure by implication on the whole entertainment—”

“Well, it is very certain I do *not* approve of it—but you mention Lady Audrey particularly—it is to oblige her that you prefer this request?”

“I have told you, mother, that it is so.”

Then Lady Lyndon looked very steadily in her son’s face, which appeared as unmoved and determined as her own; and then she said,

“And pray may I ask what Lady Audrey is to you.”

“A very pleasant acquaintance, and one whom

I should be very sorry to thwart or disoblige."

"And is that all?"

"All what, mother?"

"The extent of your regard for her?"

"At present I believe it is."

"But—but, Vere, I am very anxious to know what are your real feelings and intentions in regard to Lady Audrey, and whether you like her well enough to ask her to become your wife?"

"There are many things besides my own individual wishes to consult in such a case," returned Sir Vere, his stern brow relaxing as he replied to his mother's suggestion, showing it was not an altogether unpalatable one.

"I know there are—of course there must be; but I think I could arrange so as to meet most of them," said Lady Lyndon, laying down her work, and scanning her son's face rather eagerly.

"Thank you, mother, I am much obliged to you, and do not doubt you would help me, if things came to the worst."

His mother turned impatiently away, saying,

“I don’t know what you mean by the worst, Vere.”

“Why, what you were talking about, mother—matrimony.”

“I do not like your speaking lightly, and turning such things into jest.”

“I did not mean it, mother—I look upon it as a most serious affair; and that is the reason we will dismiss the subject for the present, and talk about something more lively; so once more let me ask you if you will sanction Clare’s appearing in the way I asked?”

“You wish to oblige Lady Audrey?—let me clearly understand that.”

“I do,” replied her son after a short pause.

“Then tell me what is the picture you wish to represent?”

“It is one you know very well—the famous one of Beatrice and Dante. My father once said Clare resembled the Beatrice in that picture; and I don’t make a bad Dante. Old Mrs. Montague made us try it. I think you would say it was a success.”

“I shall not say anything of the kind; but I do not wish to disoblige Lady Audrey, so I will make the concession for your sake and hers; but I had much rather the whole thing had never been thought of.”

“We can’t always have things exactly as we wish, mother; and it is better, if you go to people’s houses, to do a little as they do, I think, if it is nothing very much out of the way.”

“Well, I have given my consent,” said Lady Lyndon; and then, as her son was leaving the room, she added, “And—and, Vere, if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, I have given it in more ways than one.”

But her son made no answer. The door closed quickly upon him, and Lady Lyndon, with a little sigh, took up her work again, saying to herself, gently, “I am sure his father would approve of it.”

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



